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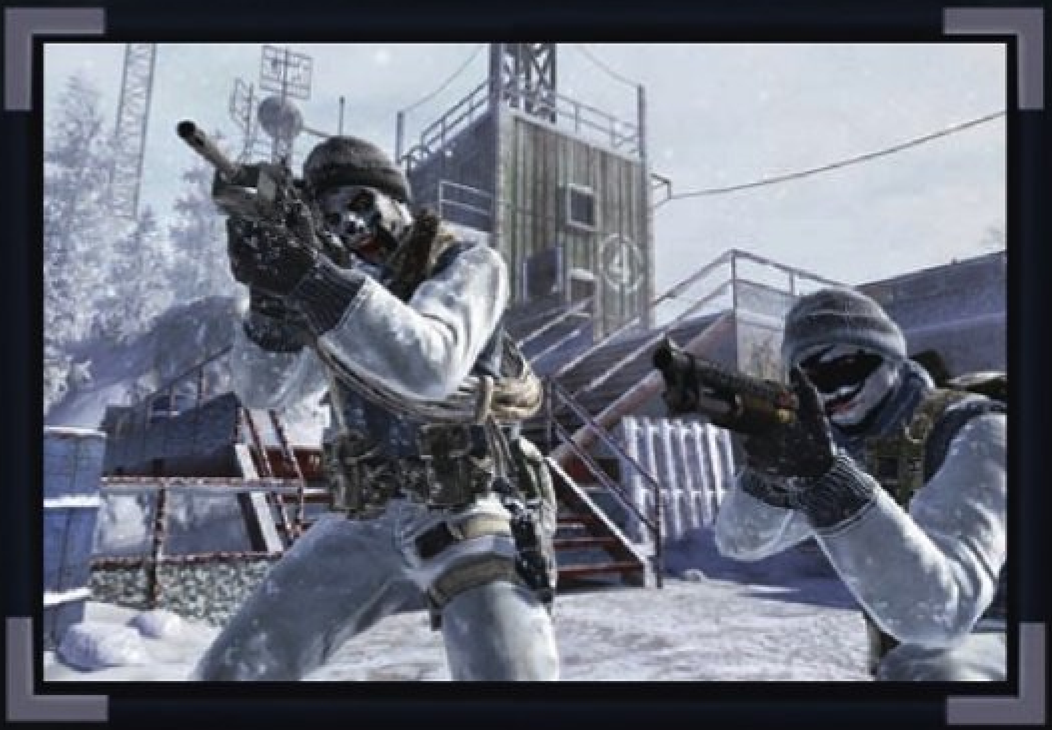

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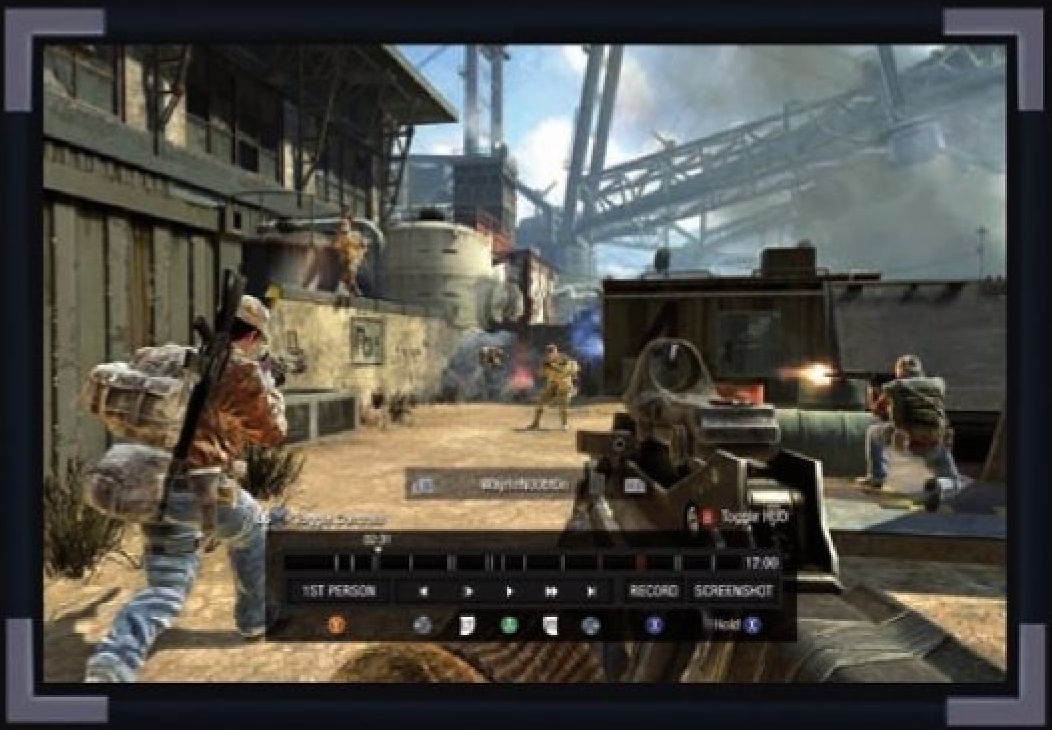
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18

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THE RETROBATES

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE RARE GAME?



DARRAN JONES

For me, it's the wonderful *Viva Piñata*. It remains perfect proof that the old Rare is still alive and well and that makes me happy.
Expertise:
Juggling a beautiful wife, two lovely girls and **Retro Gamer**
Currently playing:
Need For Speed: Hot Pursuit
Favourite game of all time:
Strider



STUART HUNT

I'd have to say *Blast Corps*, as it's the one N64 game I still boot up today. Wanton destruction, tense gameplay and a wide array of vehicles.
Expertise:
Games with flying bits in them
Currently playing:
Vanquish
Favourite game of all time:
Vanquish



JASON KELK

I'll say *Donkey Kong Country*, for the impression it originally made then and still being worth an extended dip into now.
Expertise:
Being a homebrew Herod
Currently playing:
Moon Patrol (Atari 8-bit)
Favourite game of all time:
Io



CRAIG GRANNELL

When I was young and foolish, *Donkey Kong Country 2* didn't make me want to kill things, so that. I always preferred Ultimate's output, though.
Expertise:
Games you don't need 37 fingers to control
Currently playing:
Axe In Face
Favourite game of all time:
H.E.R.O.



DAVID CROOKES

GoldenEye 007. A classic that may not feel exactly the same today given the subsequent quality of FPSs but was more than worthy of its remake.
Expertise: All things Amstrad CPC, *Dizzy*, Lynx and PlayStation
Currently playing:
Tetris
Favourite game of all time:
Broken Sword



PAUL DRURY

If we're counting Ultimate in this I'll choose *Jetpac*, but if not, then the mighty *GoldenEye 007* always gets my trigger finger itchy.
Expertise:
Anaïs Nin's influence on gaming
Currently playing:
Dance Central
Favourite game of all time:
Sheep In Space



ASHLEY DAY

I'd like to say *GoldenEye 007*, since it pretty much defined my school years and kept me off the streets, though it hasn't aged very well. In recent years I was stunned by the imagination involved in *Banjo-Kazooie: Nuts & Bolts*.
Expertise: The games of Team 17, MSX, Sega's Shining Force series
Currently playing:
Golden Sun: Dark Dawn
Favourite game of all time:
Shining Force III

LOADING...

Coming to the end of a year is always sad, so we really wanted to do something to cheer everybody up. Hopefully our festive cover does just that, and for any of you who don't like it: bah humbug. It only happens once a year.

As with last year's Christmas issue we've not gone with anything thematic, but have instead taken the opportunity to cover those articles that everyone asks for, but for some reason we never get around to running. As a result you'll find Amiga coverage in the form of *Banshee* and the awesome *Stunt Car Racer*, and a couple of classic PC games.

We've also had requests for the return of the top 25, and in particular, a look at point-and-click adventures. Well you have that too, and we've even worked out a way to keep the focus away from the LucasArts games. We also return to the days of old magazines with a look at Oliver Frey's excellent *Terminal Man* strip.

There's plenty more to enjoy, including another entry in the new (and surprisingly popular) Obscura Machina, a look back at Virgin Software and a candid interview with *Kid Chameleon* creator Steve Woita. And let's not forget our cover feature: a humongous 16-page interview that looks back at Rare's incredible past.

Merry Christmas, guys and gals. We'll see you in the New Year.

Enjoy the magazine,



CONTENTS



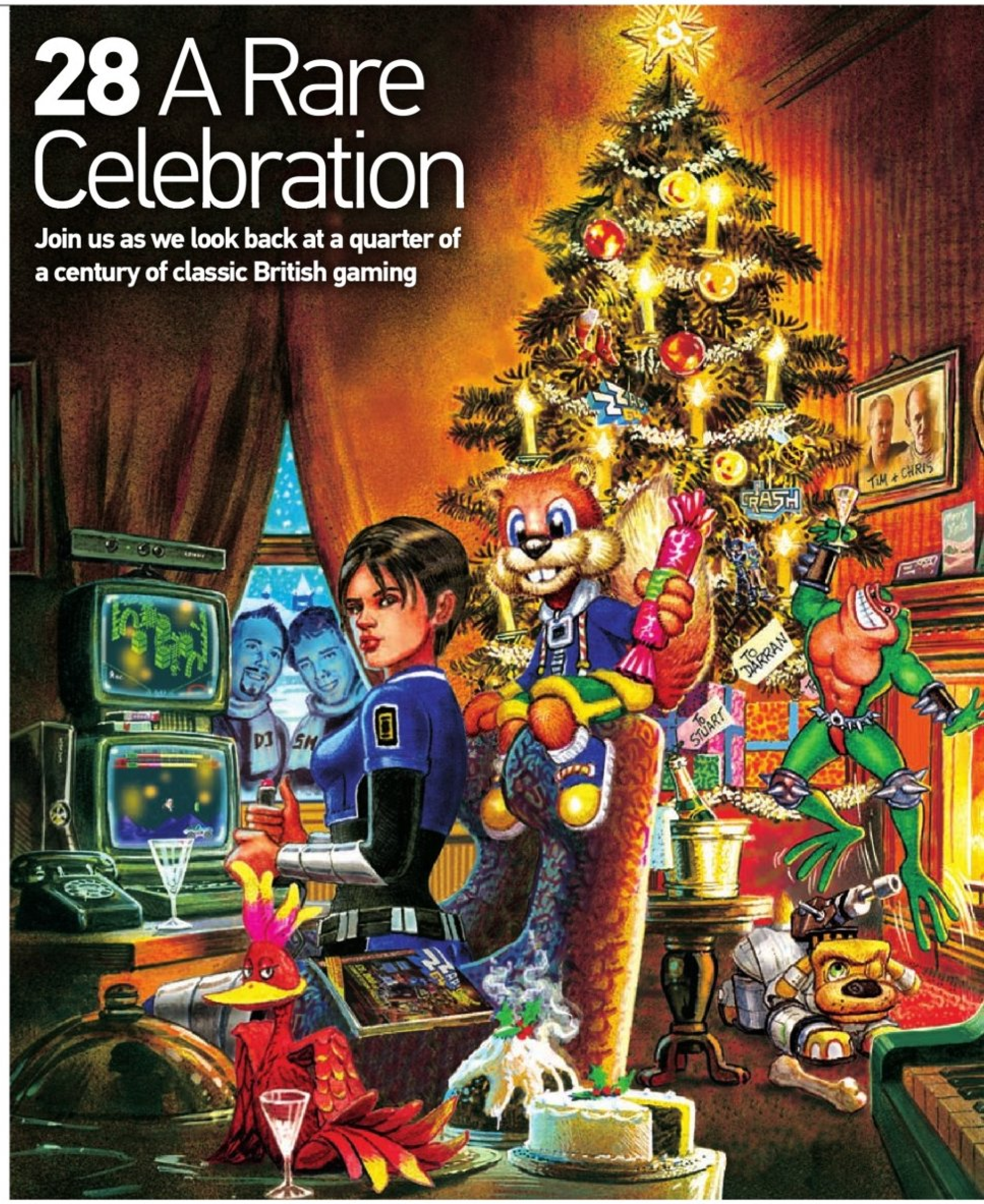
>> Load 84 Breathing new life into classic games

FEATURED

RETRO REVIVALS

28 A Rare Celebration

Join us as we look back at a quarter of a century of classic British gaming



In the hot seat this month…



18 RICHARD LEINFELLNER
The current head of Babel Media and co-founder of Palace Software looks back at his time in the industry and how it has changed in the past two decades.



86 STEVE WOITA
He's best known for his work on Mega Drive titles such as *Sonic Spinball* and *Kid Chameleon*, but there's a lot more to Steve Woita than hyperactive hedgehogs and mask-changing teenagers.



103 JONATHAN BRISTOW
You probably don't know his name, but Jonathan Bristow is a big thing in the Oric homebrew scene. We caught up with him to find out what he's working on.

"A triumph of art and sound design" Samuel Roberts



78 Future Classic

Samuel Roberts explains why everyone will still be enjoying Team Ico's spectacular and beautifully moving game in the many years to come

50 Virgin Part 1

How Richard Branson expanded into the world of videogames





58 Banshee

Behind the scenes of the cult Amiga 1200 hardcore shoot-'em-up



70 Simply The Best

We reveal the best point-and-click offerings that weren't by LucasArts

ESSENTIALS

RETRO RATED





retro GAMER.net READER'S REVIVAL



26 CASTLEVANIA LEGENDS

Michael Levy recalls the sad tale of Sonia Belmont, the vampire hunter who never got a fair break.





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>> GIVE US TWO MINUTES AND WE'LL GIVE YOU THE RETRO WORLD



>> Our report from the excellent R3PLAY event dominates this month's retro scene, while System 3 talk about the return of Putty Squad, and Elite brings the Spectrum back in virtual form on Apple's iPhone and iPad...

CONTENTS



R3PLAY: ONCE MORE UNTO THE BREACH

THE RETRO COMMUNITY GATHERS IN BLACKPOOL TO HAVE SOME FUN

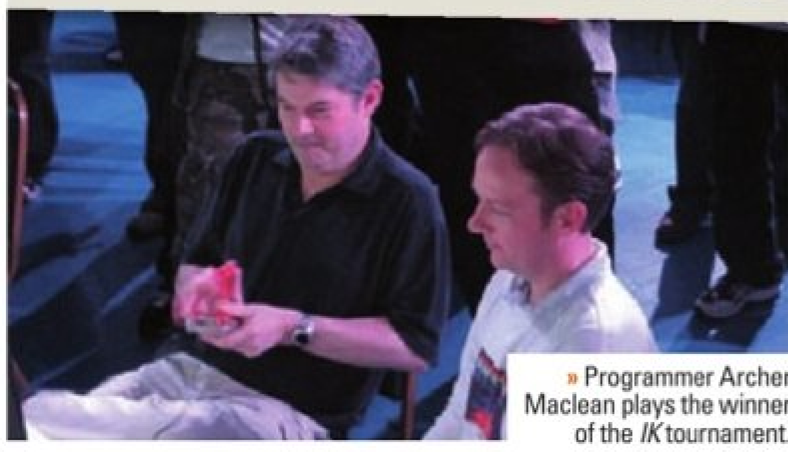




The lights of Blackpool's famous illuminations served as a beacon for gamers and industry veterans visiting last month's classic gaming extravaganza R3PLAY. Held at the Norbreck Castle Exhibition Centre, a short tram ride from the town's Pleasure Beach, this was by far the largest and most ambitious exhibition of its type yet seen in the UK.

Impressions on entering the show hall were similar to those of Olympia events of yore, with an incredible range of lovingly presented gaming goodies on offer. Arcade oldies such as *Frogger*, *Battlezone* and *Space Panic* jostled for attention alongside current fare like *Sonic 4*, *GoldenEye*, and *Kirby's Epic Yarn*, while those clamouring for the clatter of flipper on steel headed for the dozens of classic pinball machines on offer. The shoot-'em-up contingent were placated by Arcade Otaku's candy cabs, giving the chance to try a range of colourful Cave games, including the only copy of *Akai Katana* in the country.

Saturday's events were hosted by celebrity gamer and **RG** columnist Iain Lee, stepping in at the eleventh hour



» Programmer Archer Maclean plays the winner of the *IK* tournament.



» Jon Hare takes on the mighty Poland in *Sensible Soccer*.



» A networked Xbox 360 setup, with banks of colourful arcade cabinets beyond.

for a missing-in-action Gail Porter. "If I'm honest, I'm not totally sure what I was expecting," said Lee. "I've never been to one of these events before, and I think I had an image of a few geeky blokes in a small room, looking at a Spectrum and talking about various models of Kempstons. I was amazed at the scale of the event: a huge hall packed with cabs and machines and toys and ladies and all kinds of wonderful things. I was impressed at how friendly everyone was and had some wonderfully geeky chats with lots of fascinating people."

Gaming tournaments were a regular feature, with attendees able to take their pick from the likes of *Pong* played on miniature black-and-white TVs, perennial favourite *Warlords*, and Electronic Dojo's *Street Fighter IV* knockout competition. The honour of a play-off against creator Archer Maclean went to *International Karate* tournament winner John McDermott. Elsewhere, UK *Pac-Man* champion Jon Stoodley raked in a staggering 2.66 million points on his arcade cabinet, raising £455 for the British Heart Foundation in the process.

The event was a great chance to meet and quiz famous developers, with panel discussions with Gary Bracey and former Ocean staff, Sumo Digital's Steve Lycett, and Archer Maclean. One of the funniest moments of Maclean's talk came when Tony Crowther joined the audience, boosting the number of C64 coding geniuses in the room to exactly two. Fielding a question on the prolific nature of his career, Maclean gestured towards the *Monty Mole* and *Suicide Express* author and replied, "Well, I wasn't anywhere near as prolific as Tony!"

Day one was capped off with a gig by specially re-formed SID cover group Stuck In D'80s, comprising Ben Daglish on bass, Jon Hare on guitar, and Mark 'Mad Fiddler' Knight. Despite only a few hours' rehearsal, the audience was treated to rollicking performances of *Spellbound*, *Deflektor*, an impromptu *Monty On The Run*, and even a version of Hare's *Hills Theme* from *Cannon Fodder*. "Not having a set list, it was a case of doing what we do," chuckled Knight. "A muddled noise, half knowing what we're doing, half not, with the usual banter in between. I think the reception was really good. Everyone seemed to enjoy the evening. I know we did, and I hope we'll be back."

Jeff Minter helped banish hangovers on Sunday morning as he shared his love of shoot-'em-ups and hairy ungulates with a sizeable audience. He regaled all with tales from the early days of Llamasoft, right up to his new iPhone take on *Asteroids*, though host Paul Drury was visibly crushed when Minter failed to confirm that *Sheep In Space* was the best game ever made. The second talk of the day was a fascinating trip through Sensible Software's back catalogue with Jon Hare.

> **"I had some wonderfully geeky chats with lots of people"**
>
> HOST IAIN LEE GETS INTO THE SPIRIT

Hare was later on hand to take on Rafal 'Lobo' Nossek, the winner of the R3PLAY *Sensible Soccer* tournament. After a 6-0 drubbing at the hands of Nossek's native Poland, Hare joked that he was actually happy, as the previous finalist had lost 7-0. He also took the opportunity to mention his role as a representative of BAFTA, highlighting its progressive stance in recognising games and preserving the classics of old, a sentiment warmly received by all those present.

Overall, the weekend was a huge success for organiser CGEU, drawing in around 3,000 people and raising £3,500 for charities Macmillan Cancer Support, Children's Hospices UK and the National Museum of Computing. "We'd simply like to say, in addition to the many 'stars' of the show who you might have seen on stage or elsewhere, there were also numerous unsung heroes of R3PLAY, who know who they are," said CGEU's Dave Moore. "So whether you drove all around the country collecting equipment, were involved in the slick AV setup, provided arcade machines or consoles, manned the front desk, or helped set systems up, the show wouldn't have been the tremendous success it was without you. Take a bow!" And will the show be back next year? You bet.

For info on this or next year's event, head to **www.cgeu.info**. *

Retro legends on R3PLAY

>> Three of the gaming luminaries in attendance give us their thoughts...



Jeff Minter
It was a really fun weekend. The exhibition was much larger than I expected, and I knew I was in for a good time when I was playing *Star Wars* within two minutes of walking in. I really miss arcades and seeing all the games lined up, and hearing the marvellous noise of them all nearly brought a tear to my eye. I also miss the old computer shows, and the atmosphere during the weekend was a lot like those – hanging out, demonstrating new stuff, playing old stuff, bumping into old mates like Tony Crowther, being unable to walk past the bar without someone plying me with beer in exchange for a chat. There was an atmosphere of genuine love and passion for the games that can seem somewhat lacking in modern times.



Tony Crowther
Me and my son James really enjoyed our day out at the R3PLAY event; it was the biggest retro show I've ever been to. There were some things even I have never seen before – *Steel Battalion*, which was mad, and we both enjoyed the Wii drums. If I had not been so busy finalising the new game, *Harry Potter And The Deathly Hallows Part 1*, in time for the film release, I would have arranged to stop the night, as it was good to meet up with old friends like Ben, Jeff, Archie and Sumo. I've not seen Jeff in a long time so had a lot to catch up. So next time I will try to organise things better – shame I couldn't stop the night, because I still had lots to say!



Gary Bracey
I hadn't attended one of these retro things before and didn't really know what to expect. However, the passion, enthusiasm, affection and sheer exuberance showed by all the attendees just blew me away. It evoked those old computer shows of the Eighties – serious nostalgia for me! Well done to the organisers and everyone who donated their time to make the event so special. I'm just disappointed I couldn't stay for longer, but thanks to all the kind people who stopped me for a chat, and a big shout-out to David and Anna for that great Ocean room – shocked when I first walked in and saw it, but extremely proud to see so much interest. Nice tribute to Joffa also.

THE RETRO DEBATE

>> What did you enjoy most about R3PLAY?

VISIT **RETROGAMER.NET/FORUM** TO HAVE YOUR SAY

r0jws
Definitely meeting up with fellow forumites, although the majority of the guys I hung out with were from Amibay. We don't get to meet up much.

the_hawk
Without a shadow of a doubt the people. It's always a pleasure meeting up with like-minded geeks. You people are lovely.

MikeFishCake
Uber-multiplayer *Bomberman* on the plasma screens. Flippin' awesome.

sirclive1
For me it was meeting some of the guys off here, plus the *Warlords* competition, which was a right laugh.

Rinoa
Meeting up with both new and familiar faces. Closely followed by the SID'80s gig.

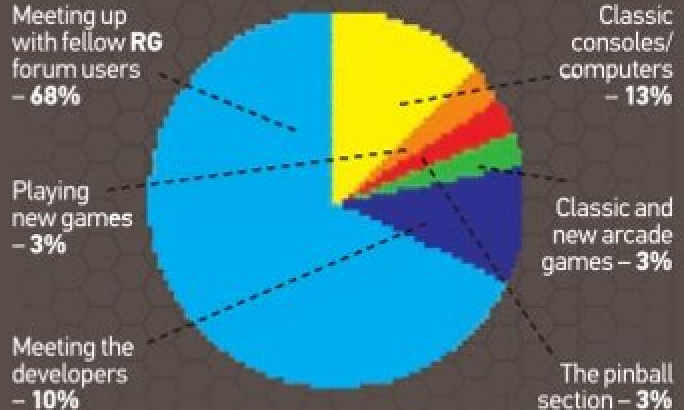
merman
I spent more time chatting with friends than actually gaming. Of course, that does include giving two of the talks and watching the others. Not to mention the fact that I now count Jeff Minter and Archer Maclean as friends. If you go back to the Eighties and tell me that, I wouldn't believe you!

psj3809
Could only vote for one thing so I voted for meeting up with fellow forumites. Did have a few chats with the celebs this time, which was pretty good, but overall there was a ton of things to do, lots of people to meet. It was superb.

TMR
Meeting up with other **RG** forum bunnies was the top priority, even if I didn't actually meet half the people I wanted to!

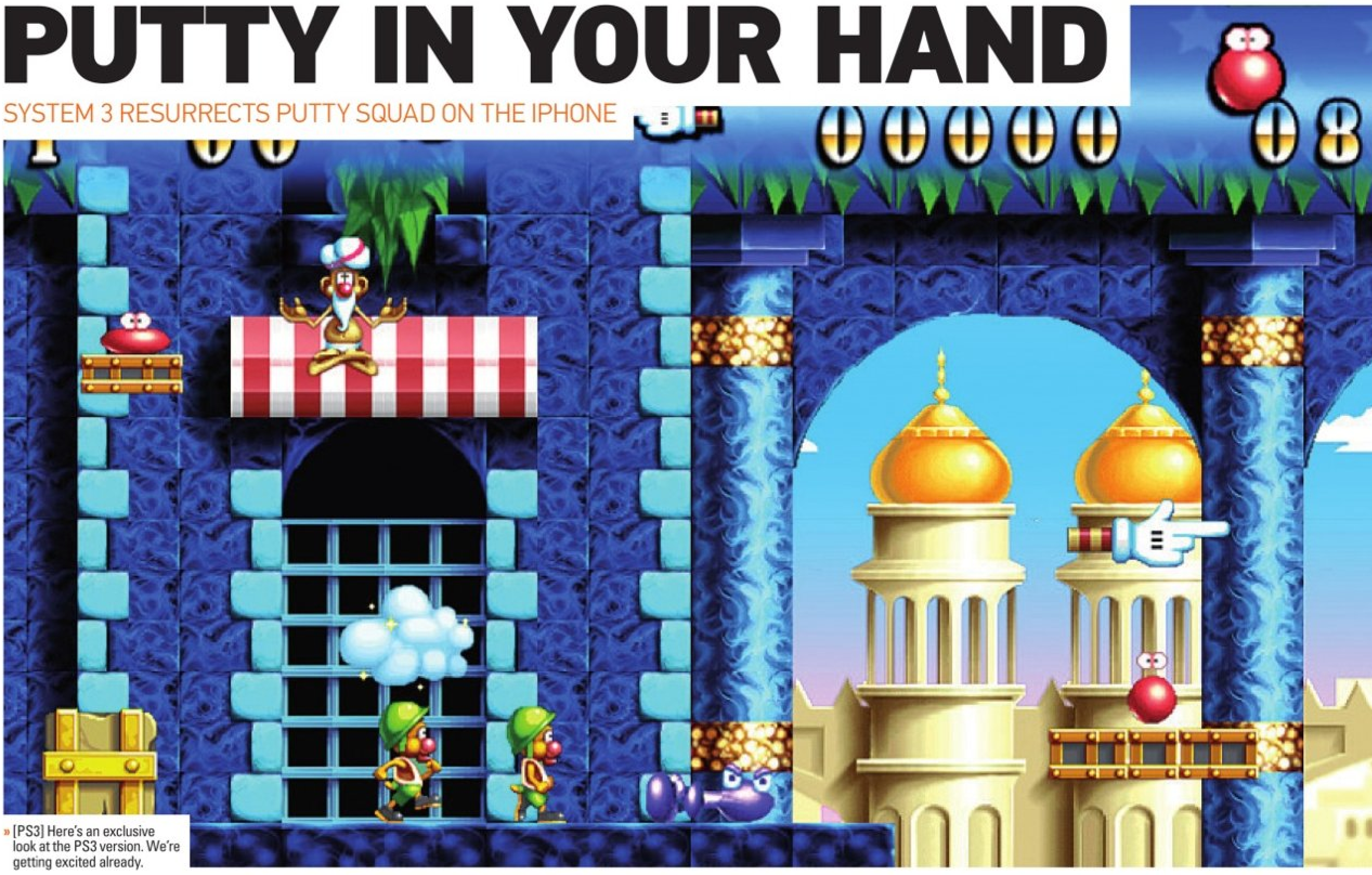
Antiriad2097
Sorry guys, I love you but you're not Jeff Minter. It's always nice to meet the forumites, but I got a real buzz from meeting some of the superstars of gaming this time. I can legitimately claim that I roadied for SID'80s!

FORUM OPINION
What did you like best about R3PLAY?



PUTTY IN YOUR HAND

SYSTEM 3 RESURRECTS PUTTY SQUAD ON THE IPHONE



» [PS3] Here's an exclusive look at the PS3 version. We're getting excited already.

If you're an Amiga fan then you might remember a particularly excellent platformer from System 3 called *Putty*. If you're an uber hardcore Amiga fan then you'll certainly remember *Putty Squad*, a sequel that received glowing reviews but sadly never made it to retail shelves, where the Amiga's dying status meant System 3 only released its SNES port.

While we've heard rumours of the game resurfacing as far back as issue 64, we now have proof that the mythical Amiga game will finally be made available. Excited? You should be. We were able to sit down with System 3's boss Mark Cale in order to get some information about this momentous occasion.

Retro Gamer: Why did you decide to release *Putty Squad* for the iPhone?
Mark Cale: The original *Putty* was one of the most iconic characters on the Amiga. The circumstances surrounding the eventual non-release of *Putty Squad* on the Amiga inadvertently imbued the game with a Holy Grail-style status. The rapidly dying Amiga market made it impossible to release the game, despite the rave reviews it received. It's always been our intention to bring the game out, but it had to be the right time.



» Mark Cale, founder of System 3.

RG: Is this based on the SNES build or the missing Amiga build?
MC: The new game is based entirely on the original Amiga code and logic. We're lucky enough to still have John Twiddy, lead programmer of *Putty Squad* Amiga and now head of development at System 3, and graphics whizz Phil Thornton on board, so we're literally using that code and transferring it over. You can't ask for more authenticity than that, and this guarantees that you'll be playing the best possible version.



» The Amiga version's rave reviews and extreme rarity make it highly sought after among Amiga fans.

RG: How have you integrated *Putty*'s controls into the iPhone?
MC: There are many things to consider with a game like *Putty*. While other styles of games may be able to rely on vague accelerometer controls, *Putty* is a platform game that relies on accurate controls and dependable, reliable jumping. We're not yet convinced that motion controls deliver an enjoyable experience, but we're trying lots of different options.

RG: What do you feel the iPhone version offers over the original SNES game?
MC: Well, firstly, *Putty Squad* received universally high praise when it was reviewed for the Amiga. John Twiddy and Phil Thornton did an outstanding job the first time around.

Some old games pass the test of time and some don't. *Putty Squad* is most certainly in the former group. It has timeless gameplay and you'll have as much fun playing it now as you did


CU AMIGA GAME REVIEW

Super Putty was one of the funniest platform games ever released, and now System 3 have come up with a sequel. Tony Dillon prepares to have his ribs tickled and his sides split.

PUTTY SQUAD

BOUNCING ALONG




» [Amiga] While it was released on the SNES, the only way to play the Amiga version was as part of an eight-level demo.

then. Of course, it helps that John is on board to cast an executive eye over it all.

RG: Can we expect to see other System 3 games on the iPhone in the future?
MC: Absolutely. As the last remaining independent British publisher, dating back 28 years, we have a vast back catalogue. But we're fully aware that only some of those experiences can re-create the same feelings in people as they did the first time around, and we're working hard to choose the right ones.

RG: So will we ever get a new *Last Ninja* game?
MC: To create a new *Last Ninja* game that does the series justice and competes with other games on the market is quite simply beyond us as an independent British publisher. We cannot afford to spend £50 million+ on one game, and that's what it would take to compete technically with the likes of *Ninja Gaiden* and *Assassin's Creed*. If we can't do it properly and retain the legacy we already have with the current trilogy, then there's no point in doing it at all.

We get emails about it daily and in the office we talk about it daily, but the chances of it happening are low.

Now, if you're talking about remaking the trilogy on new machines such as the 3DS or Apple platforms, that is something that is far more likely. But we have to make the decision on whether this is something that people actually want. Perhaps your readers can help with that?



RG: Does the release of *Putty Squad* mean that System 3 will be releasing more content on other digital systems?
MC: Yes, definitely. In October we launched *Ferrari: The Race Experience* for the PS3 exclusively on PSN for £11.99. Nothing like that has ever been done before. System 3 is the first, and we're taking a big risk because use of the PlayStation Store isn't as widespread as it needs to be… yet.

The fact remains, though, that if we had launched it as a physical product it would have cost around £40. The fact that we can give people the same experience, albeit without a disc and a nice box, for a quarter of the price makes it a no-brainer for us.

> **"Plenty claim to have a secret build, but only a few people have that code"**
> CALE ON THE AMIGA VERSION'S RARITY

RG: So what do digital releases offer over retail releases?
MC: Two things: price and convenience. Apple has set the example in the music world with iTunes and now entire generations of people are comfortable with owning a digital song rather than a CD single. The gaming industry is a little way behind, but digital offers the very same convenience for videogames. Go online, click, buy and a short time later you're playing your game.

RG: Why do you think *Putty Squad* remains so popular?
MC: The two main factors have to be superb design and that air of mystery that surrounds the game. Plenty of people will claim that they have a super-secret build of the game, but the truth is that only a few people have that code. It's become a bit of a myth in the gaming world, and we all love a good myth! *

MICRO BYTES
Snippets of news from the exciting world of retro



>> Retro gifts
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>> More DC hits on the way
Sega has confirmed the next two Dreamcast games set for Xbox Live Arcade and PSN. Although no firm dates have been given, *Sega Bass Fishing* and *Space Channel 5 Part 2* will be the next two titles, joining *Sonic Adventure* and the recently released *Crazy Taxi*. We're particularly excited about *Space Channel 5*, as it was never released in the UK. Here's hoping that it's not cut down in any way.



>> Ninja story
The reboot news continues with word that Tecmo Koei is preparing to give its *Ninja Gaiden* series a new lease of life. As with the new *Tomb Raider* game, only artwork has been shown off so far, but unlike Lara's latest adventure, actual information about the new game is extremely scarce, with the developers recently revealing that it's unlikely to have too many ties to past games.

Here's the bio...
Iain Lee has been a fervent gamer since he was tiny. And that was a long time ago. In between playing computer games and collecting crap from eBay, he has presented Channel 4's *The 11 O'Clock Show* and *Rise*, and currently does bits of stand-up as well as presenting the *2 Hour Long Late Night Radio Show* on Absolute Radio at 11pm.



Hi there. My name's **Iain Lee**. You might remember me from Thumb Bandits, The 11 O'Clock Show and Absolute Radio, but now I'm here to confess my love for retro



Illustration by **Lee Piper**

Back in time

I don't want to suggest for one moment that everything is crap now, but everything is really crap now. The clocks have just gone back, or forwards or whatever it is they do, and they have worked their voodoo magic to confuse me. It's now early evening and it's well dark. How the bloody hell has that happened?

Anyway, I was walking home and it reminded me of being young and rushing home from school to watch a bit of telly, have a cheese sandwich and then play some computer games. I thought I'd try to recapture a slice of that magic, so I knocked up some food and turned on kids' telly. I haven't seen *John Craven's Newsround* in years, but it's certainly not the show I remember. For a start, where is John Craven? How can you call it *John Craven's Newsround* without the man himself? And instead of Craven and his knitwear, I got a load of funky graphics and well shot reports. No, this is simply not right.

The trip down memory lane didn't last long. I gave up as soon as I realised that Andy Crane wasn't going to come and save me from this modern hell.

But some things change for the better. I really don't have the time or patience for cassette-loading games any more. Sure, sometimes if I have the flat to myself for a weekend, it's a great way to spend the time. It can be intensely satisfying getting a game to load that you know has a little blip in the tape by either playing alchemist with the volume control, or sometimes pushing the play button down really hard at a specific point in the loading procedure – always had to do that with my hooky copy of *Commando*.

But I now have responsibilities. I'm a father. I'm in the process of selling a flat and buying a house. I work – albeit for two hours a day, and it is just dicking about on the radio, so it's not *real* work, but, you know, give me a break. Every second is precious to me. So it's great to be able to pick up a controller, press a button and have immediate access to a load of great games. For example, later on this evening, I'm going to treat myself to a lovely game of *Jetpac* on my 360. Beautiful.

It's not all rosy in the garden of retro gaming on modern consoles. It's such a shame that the Xbox Game Room, or whatever it's called, turned out to be a massive pile of poop. Just releasing games because they are old does not make successful retro gaming. They've got to be *good* games. And why aren't there more old Spectrum/C64/BBC/Oric games available for the 360 or PS3? Can someone please pull their finger out of their arse and make that happen?

I guess what I'm trying to say is we're lucky and we have things pretty good… but they could still be so much better.

Anyway, must dash. *Neighbours* is on in a minute. I need to see what happens to Plain Jane Superbrain. I suspect that underneath that geeky look, she's actually quite hot!

We have things pretty good. . .
but they could still be so much better

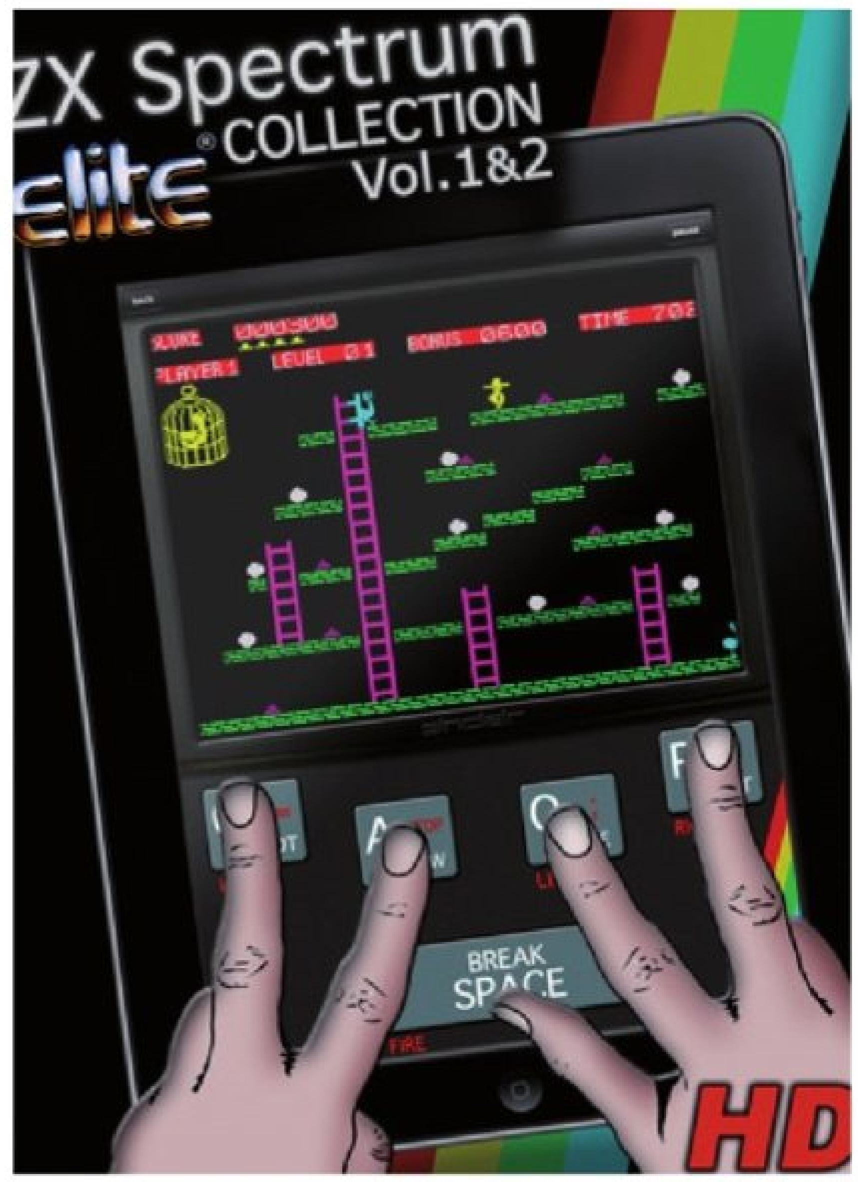
SPECTRUM GAMES GET TOUCHY FEELY

ELITE'S SPECTRUM EMULATOR COMES TO APPLE'S IPAD

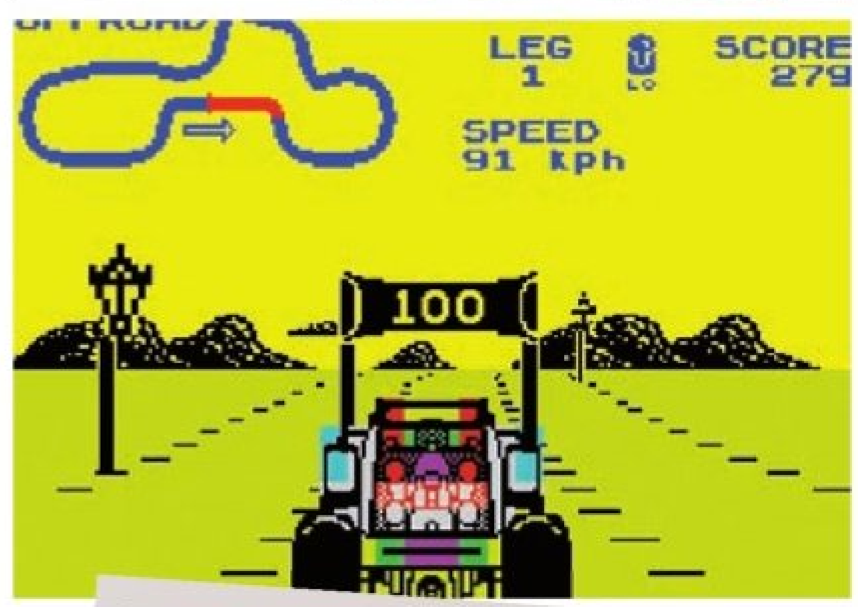
Following the release of *ZX Spectrum: Elite Collection* for the iPhone, Elite, the popular Eighties Brit software house that has turned attentions to the burgeoning mobile phone game market, has recently released a version for Apple's tablet, the iPad.

Available to download through the iTunes Store, *ZX Spectrum: Elite Collection HD* is a new compilation that encompasses the first two volumes previously released for the iPhone. Containing 12 classic Spectrum titles from Elite and Durrel's extensive back catalogue including *Saboteur!*, *Frank Bruno's Boxing*, *Buggy Boy*, *Harrier Attack*, *Turbo Esprit* and *Chuckie Egg*, this pack is available to download for a very reasonable £2.99 ($4.99). In addition, those purchasing the app will receive a free update in the coming month, and Elite is planning to release a further four game packs, with each volume, priced at £1.19 ($1.99), containing six games, extending the library of games playable on Apple devices to 36 titles.

"We cut our teeth on the platform 25-plus years ago and had data evidencing a small but nonetheless significant consumer demand for a properly engineered emulator," Elite's managing director, Steve Wilcox, told **Retro Gamer**. "We had access to the essential intellectual properties. We wanted to take steps to 'regularise the market' and offer access to many of the thousands of fantastic ZX Spectrum games, created since 1982, via mobile and wireless devices. We started by picking games from our own catalogue of more than 50 games and listened to what consumers told us they wanted to play. The iPhone app has been in the market for a month and a half and the iPad app for only a day and a half – in the next few weeks we'll start delivering the first of the many games that consumers told us they wanted to play." *



» [iPad] Alas, even the power of the iPad isn't enough to replicate rubber keys with a glass touch screen.



* WHAT WE THINK

Darran



I feel two ways about this new iPad app. While I'm chuffed to bits to see that old Spectrum classics are now portable, the controls occasionally let these games down. Here's hoping other publishers get on board as well.

Stuart



I don't own anything with 'i' in front of its name, so unless Darran brings his iGadgets into work I'm unlikely to experience the app. I do like the look of the interface and the list of games currently available. Hopefully Elite releases those further volumes.

David



It's important that games of old are introduced to new players, and Spectrum games on an iPad will allow some of those games to be played with none of the hassle of PC emulators. I know Elite has been enthusiastically signing up games for the app, so it has a great future.



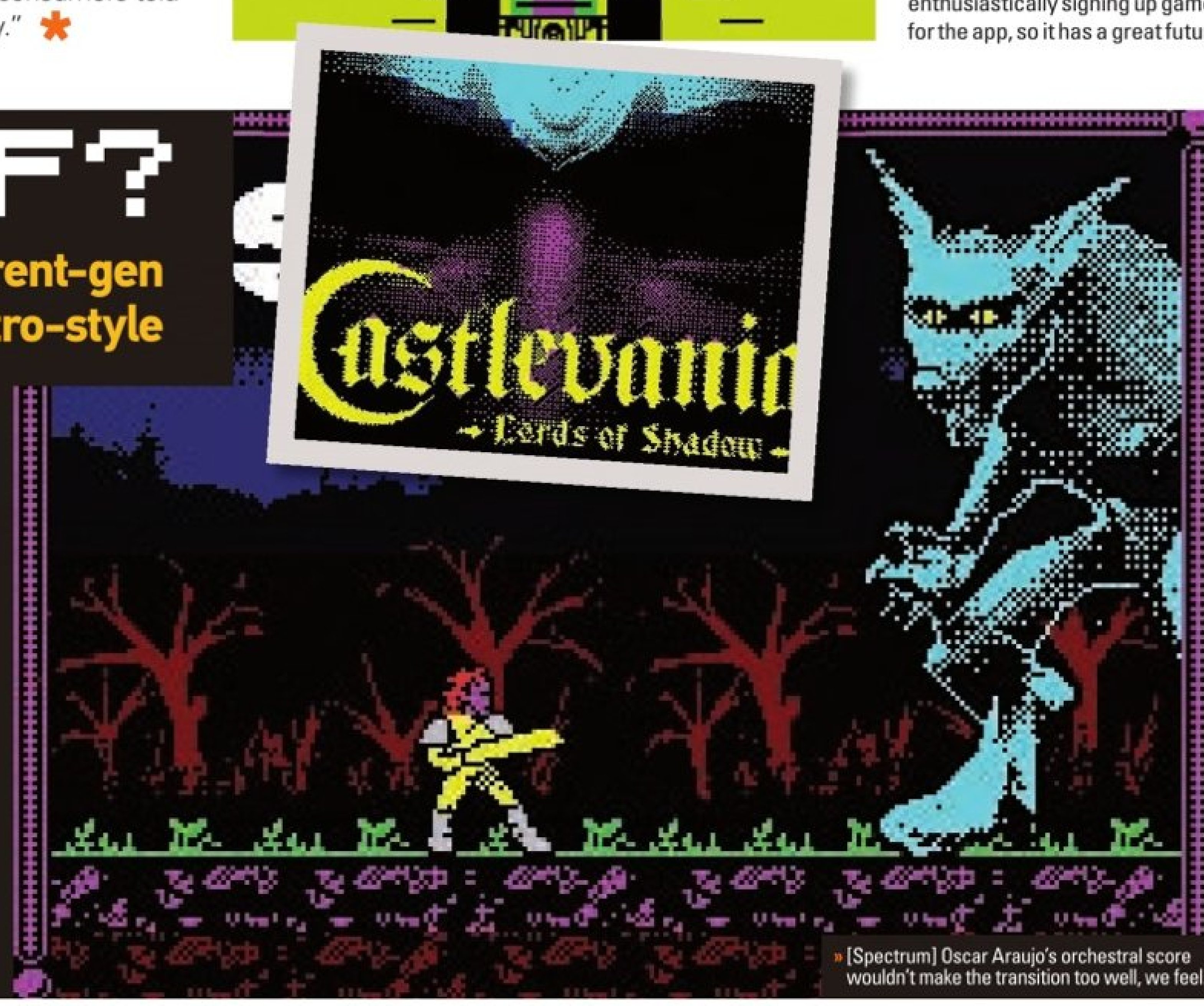
WHAT IF?

Your favourite current-gen games remade, retro-style

Subject No 14

Castlevania: Lords Of Shadow

CASTLEVANIA STARTED LIFE in 8-bit, when the franchise debuted on Nintendo's Famicom Disk System in 1986. That was almost 25 years ago, and much about the series has certainly changed. Indeed, it's taken all of that time for fans to finally receive a decent 3D *Castlevania* game. This did have us wondering this month, though – how would the game look if it was pushed through a 2D Spectrum filter? Trevor, it's over to you…



» [Spectrum] Oscar Araujo's orchestral score wouldn't make the transition too well, we feel.

>> PAUL DAVIES GIVES HIS VIEWS ON THE RETRO WORLD

Here's my bio…
In 1992 I started out on *Mean Machines Sega* and *Nintendo Magazine System*. In 1995 I became editor of *CVG*. I led the *CVG* website from 1998 until Christmas 2000, then I left journalism to be concept design manager at Criterion Games. I returned to journalism in 2002 and from 2005 I've been running my own company, Unlikely Hero.



Hello, retro gamers. My name is **Paul Davies**. I used to be the editor of CVG and have also worked on a number of classic gaming magazines over the years

All I want for Christmas is games

Before banging on about the games that made my Christmas in year dot, I thought it would be more fun to think about why setting aside your favourite game for Christmas feels so right.

The thing with the Big Christmas Game is that you've subconsciously been taking notes on why it deserves pride of place, galvanising everything you've ever known about what makes games so great. You're happy because you can recognise this, and overjoyed that whichever game it is meets all those expectations. Bingo – faith renewed!

Adding to this incredible sense of wellbeing is the goodwill from family and friends, who are all taking polite interest in your antics. Not only do you have permission to play *Call Of Duty* in the living room, but aunts and uncles are applauding. Okay, they're not; they're just saying, 'Amazing what they can do nowadays', but you take what you can get.

Basically, while high on sugar and floating on booze, playing the Big Christmas Game is like ruling the world for about an hour. It is a moment to savour before you're asked to turn it off because the kids want to watch *Bob The Builder*.

Anyway, my favourite Christmas games down the years have been as follows: *Colossal Cave Adventure*, impressing my parents but not my brother; *Pac-Man* miniature LCD machine, impressing my best mate but nobody else; *Sonic The Hedgehog*, which even my cousin enjoyed and she thought games were a disease before the Wii; *Super Mario Kart*, although we were asked to turn it down; *Ridge Racer*, which in hindsight did look terrible, so no wonder my dad left the room; *Christmas NiGHTS*, generally causing confusion and possibly one case of illness; *Ridge Racer* on the PS2, for which my dad decided to stay; *Soul Calibur*, which my nephew loved so much it became scary; *Zelda: The Wind Waker*, which blew the socks off my cousin's husband; *Twilight Princess* and *Wii Sports*: 'Can I please have the controller back, everyone?'; *Uncharted: Drake's Fortune*, which made my mum think she was watching a cartoon.

This year I think it's going to be *Halo: Reach*, because I'm hoping to impress everyone with my online ranking. In years to come I will look back and cringe.

Merry Christmas! Enjoy your game!



Illustration by **Lee Piper**

Playing the Big Christmas Game is like ruling the world for about an hour

THE VAULT

TREASURES FROM THE RETRO CHEST

Gauntlet Wizard T-shirt

- **RRP:** $24 (approx £15)
- **Buy it from:** www.meatbun.us

Soon to release a new line of retro gaming T-shirts to its already excellent range, online American retro T-shirt store Meatbun has been whetting our appetites by drip-feeding a couple of new designs onto its website recently. And this one in particular, which displays the yellow wizard from *Gauntlet*, instantly caught our eye. It comes in two flavours: a nice sky blue variant and the cosmic black variant we've shown here. We prefer this one because of the cool way that blue colouration of his hand looks like the bearded one is about to shoot us for some health.



USB Classic VCS controller

- **RRP:** $24.99 (approx £16)
- **Buy it from:** www.thinkgeek.com

Only for true Atari maniacs we'd say – given that despite being one of the most iconic controllers, Atari's VCS stick is also one of the most unresponsive (although we've not tried this particular one out our ourselves). Certainly, with a single fire button it probably isn't best suited to take on the complex nature of modern PC games. But still, you'll find no better nostalgia fix than wrestling with this beast. It's as potent a shot of nostalgia as watching *The Fall Guy* in a sleeveless T-shirt.



TREASURE OF THE MONTH

Pac-Man Ghosts desk lamp

- **RRP:** $69.99 each (approx £43)
- **Buy it from:** www.thinkgeek.com

While useful, lamps are generally quite boring things. If you were given one as a gift the chances are you'd probably outwardly act all appreciative of the fact but inside your true self will be imagining what it would be like to smash the light-emitter around the head of the light-emitter-giver. However, if lamps were designed in a way that they looked awesome, or resembled awesome things – like, say, Pac-Man's spectral foes Blinky, Inky, Pinky and Clyde – then this problem would easily be solved. Receive something cool like that and there's a strong chance you'd probably act genuinely appreciative of receiving such a great gift, and those pangs of unwarranted lamp-on-head violence will never enter your brain. Thus, if you are planning to buy someone a lamp at any point ever, we feel it our duty to direct you to these cool ones from **Thinkgeek.com**. Available in four different colours, these are pretty much guaranteed to light up the life of any *Pac-Man* fan.



NES 320GB hard drive

- **RRP:** £99.95
- **Buy it from:** www.retrogt.com

Though you can easily snap up a 320GB external hard drive for half the price of this one, there's a big chance none of those will look (or play) anything like a NES cart. It seems Retro GT is branching out into new areas of retro merchandise, kicking off with these new external hard drives from Freekade. As well as being able to store 320GB worth of whatever you like on them, the carts will also slot into your NES and play whatever game has been modded. Currently the choices are *Tecmo World Wrestling*, *Cobra Triangle*, *Blades Of Steel* and *Robocop 2*.





Bayonetta figurine

■ **RRP:** £32.99

■ **Buy it from:** www.jandjsgames.com

We loved *Bayonetta* for many reasons, and not just because the titular heroine sometimes wore her hair like a bikini. Mostly, the reason came from the various nods and winks the game made to past Sega and Clover Studio games, including *God Hand*, *Sonic*, *Viewtiful Joe*, *Space Harrier* and *After Burner*. Anyway, if you're anything like us and enjoyed the game immensely, you might, be interested in purchasing this collectable figurine of the angel-slaying witch pulling what can only be described as a lunge-fart.

Casio Kung Fu Fight LCD portable

■ **RRP:**: £26.99

■ **Buy it from:** www.rewind-gaming.co.uk

If you're looking for retro gaming rarities and oddities then Rewind Gaming is a good place to visit. Not only does it appear to be the official stockist of all things Amstrad GX4000, but the occasional weird never-before-seen item also appears on the website - such as this Casio Kung-Fu portable, which we've never encountered before and can find very little information about on internet (not that we tried especially hard). If you're an aspiring website creator looking for a muse, then this could be it. And we're pretty confident **www.casiokungfuportableshrine.com** isn't taken either.







Bathroom Buddy T-shirt

■ **RRP:** £19.00

■ **Buy it from:** www.nerdoh.co.uk

The award for most random idea to base a T-shirt on has to go to Nerdoh this month, which depicts an illustration of the jokey Bathroom Buddy prop used in the classic Eighties Christmas movie *Gremlins*. For that bizarre reason alone we quite like the shirt, though we're not that enamoured by the slime green colour of it. Still, it is *Gremlins*, so if any piece of apparel could get away with being clad in that garish green hue it's probably this one – or maybe an Incredible Hulk suit.

TOP FIVE T-SHIRTS



01 A Miserable Little Pile Of Secrets T-shirt
■ **RRP:** $24.99 (approx £16)
■ **Buy it from:** meatbun.us/store/



02 Amstrad
■ **RRP:** £14.95
■ **Manufacturer:** Retro GT
■ **Buy it from:** www.retrogt.com



03 Sonic Power-ups
■ **RRP:** $14.95 (approx £10)
■ **Manufacturer:** Retro GT
■ **Buy it from:** www.retrogt.com

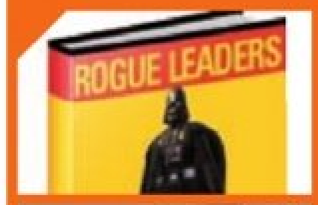


04 Coexist T-shirt
■ **RRP:** $15.99 - $17.99
■ **Manufacturer:** Thinkgeek.com
■ **Buy it from:** www.thinkgeek.com



05 Dizzy
■ **RRP:** £14.95
■ **Manufacturer:** Retro GT
■ **Buy it from:** www.retrogt.com

TOP FIVE BOOKS



01 Rogue Leaders: The Story Of LucasArts
■ **RRP:** £34.99 ■ **Publisher:** Titan Books
■ **Buy it from:** www.amazon.co.uk



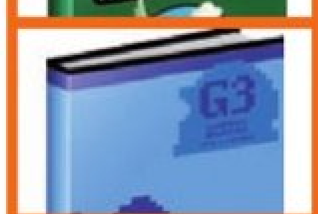
02 Classic Home Video Games 1985-1988 ■ **RRP:** $55 (approx £34)
■ **Author:** Brett Weiss
■ **Buy it from:** www.amazon.com



03 Racing The Beam
■ **RRP:** £14.95
■ **Publisher:** MIT Press
■ **Buy it from:** www.amazon.co.uk



04 Game Over
■ **RRP:** £22.14
■ **Publisher:** Cyberactive Media Group
■ **Buy it from:** www.amazon.co.uk



05 Gamespite Quarterly: Issue 3
■ **RRP:** From $12 ■ **Author:** Jeremy Parish
■ **Buy it from:** www.gamespite.com

TOP FIVE MISCELLANEOUS



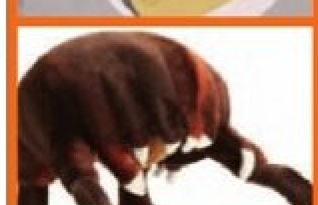
01 Mega Drive Card Holder
■ **RRP:** $34.10 (approx £21)
■ **Manufacturer:** Banpresto
■ **Buy it from:** www.strapya-world.com



02 Grow Your Own Moai Statue (aka DOH)
■ **RRP:** $5.99 (£4)
■ **Buy it from:** www.thinkgeek.com



03 Retro Videogame Propaganda Posters
■ **RRP:** £33 ■ **Manufacturer:** Steven Thomas ■ **Buy it from:** www.thinkgeek.com



04 Headcrab Plushie
■ **RRP:** $24.99 (approx £16)
■ **Manufacturer:** Unknown
■ **Buy it from:** www.thinkgeek.com



05 Namco Dioramas
■ **RRP:** £5
■ **Manufacturer:** Namco
■ **Buy it from:** www.japantrendshop.com



A MOMENT WITH...
Richard Leinfellner

Each issue, we put an industry veteran in the hotseat. This month, we chat to Richard Leinfellner, formerly of Palace Software

Who is Richard Leinfellner?

Richard ended up in games "by accident"; on covering a friend's job at the Video Palace, he suggested they should make games, which was the start of Palace Software. Post-Palace he was executive producer on games for Mindscape and EA, and he's now CEO at Babel Media.



» [C64] *Barbarian*'s violence and blood got it banned in Germany.



Which of your games would you recommend to our readers?
Some of them are a bit dated now, running on hardware that belongs in a museum, but I personally liked *Warhammer Dark Omen* – it was a lot of fun to make and play. There was also an obscure game called *Auto Destruct* no one will have heard of. It was a 3D driving game set in an open world – like *GTA III* with destructible scenery, but on PlayStation. It was way ahead of its time, but EA's marketing group felt since it was not *Need For Speed* it was unable to market the game. More recently, I got sucked into *Fallout 3*, which we also did some work on.

What's your proudest memory from your time in the industry?
Going to a retro show and having people half my age ask me to autograph their *Cauldron* and *Barbarian* boxes. It made me feel quite proud – and also kind of ancient.

What's the most difficult thing you've encountered while working on a game?
Making the first 12 months of development as productive as the last six. It always feels like so much time and effort is wasted in the beginning solving irrelevant problems, dealing with licensors and doing exec gameplay reviews. But at the end it all comes together with a heroic team effort.

Which industry veteran do you most admire and why?
Alexey Pajitnov, creator of *Tetris*. I met him a few times and was in awe of him just being a normal guy. He told me he wrote the game in a day and had no idea of its potential. But what's most impressive is despite *Tetris* rights issues, he wasn't bitter and thought his best work was to come.

Which game do you wish you'd made?
Doom! Seeing that was my first 'Wow! That's impossible!' moment. It's genius tech and such good level design. Who could forget the awesome BFG 9000?

And which character would you most liked to have worked on?
James Bond. There's so much potential, but other than *GoldenEye*, *Bond* games are badly done. I've worked on licences before and they restrict you. The licensor's lawyers, who approve the content, are so afraid of getting fired for bringing IP into disrepute that they won't take any chances. This results in middle-of-the-road inoffensive crap. I'd like to see a *Bond* game done with the edge of *Call Of Duty*.





» [PC] *BattleForge* for EA is one of the most recent titles that Richard has been involved with.

What's your darkest memory of being in the videogame industry?
The emotions of going from delivering hits like *Cauldron*, *Barbarian*, *Warhammer*, *Theme Park World* and *Populous 3* to duds like *Catwoman* and *ShoX*. Games that fail are emotionally draining and burn relationships. Unfortunately, they are part and parcel of the entertainment business.

And your best?
Being at the Leisure Electronic Trader show in 1985 with *Cauldron* and watching a six-year-old girl having huge fun crashing the witch into mountains. She had to be dragged away by her mum.

How has the industry changed in the last 20 years?
It's become very complex and mistakes are expensive. Also, teams are so big now that you can't afford to buy them all a round of drinks after work.

Can you share an interesting anecdote with us from your time in the industry?
When we first released *Barbarian* it was banned in Germany. We found out the judgement was based on hearsay, and we appealed! Try as they might, the prosecuting lawyers could not play the game well enough to execute the offending 'flying neck chop'. We sold thousands based on the controversy until one of the lawyers hired a kid to show them how it was done – and then we were banned! A week later, we changed the red blood to green and were back on the shelves. *

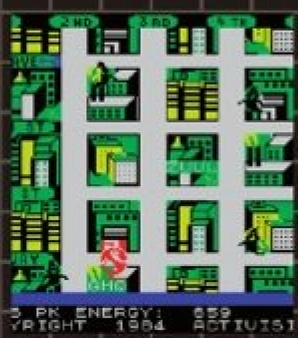
10 December – 06 January

retrodiary

>> A month of retro events both past and present



10 December 1982
■ *ET: The Extra Terrestrial* is released by Atari on its 2600 console. A legend is born… for the wrong reasons.



10 December 1984
■ Activision and David Crane release *Ghostbusters* on the Spectrum. Many get ghost bait and make their way to Zuul.



10 December 1993
■ A landmark moment arrives with the worldwide release of *Doom* on PC. First-person shooters finally come of age.



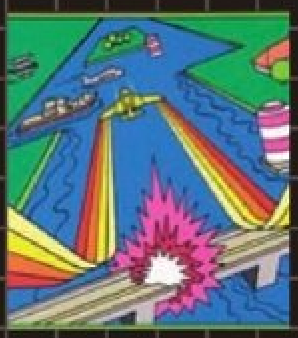
12 December 1991
■ Sega finally releases its Mega-CD add-on for the Mega Drive. Japan once again gets the hardware first…



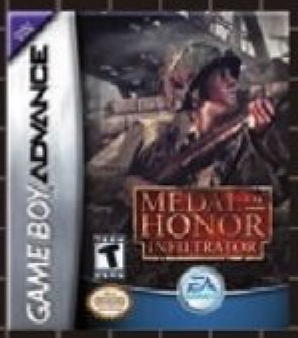
13 December 2007
■ *NiGHTS: Journey Of Dreams*, the sequel to the Saturn's *NiGHTS Into Dreams*, makes its worldwide debut in Japan on the Wii.



13 December 1995
■ *The 11th Hour*, the sequel to the interactive horror adventure *The 7th Guest*, is released in the UK on PC-DOS.



13 December 1982
■ Activision releases *River Raid* on the Atari 2600 system.



12 December 2003
■ *Medal Of Honor: Infiltrator* is released in the UK and exclusively on the Game Boy Advance.



15 December 2006
■ The last Nintendo-developed game for its GameCube console is released: *The Legend Of Zelda: Twilight Princess*.



19 December 2008
■ The blue spiky one is back in the UK with the PS3 release of *Sonic Unleashed*.



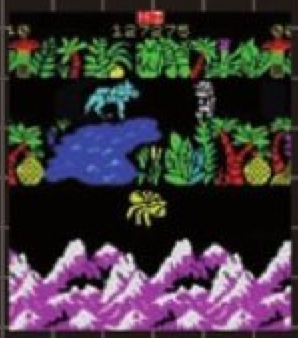
20 December 2008
■ PopCap Games releases *Bejeweled Blitz* as a Facebook application. Like?



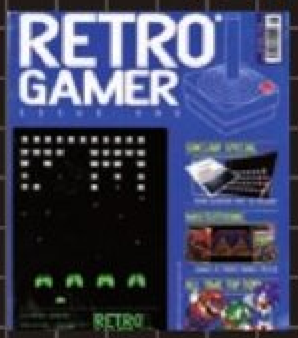
21 December 1990
■ Amstrad ceases production of the Spectrum, with the disk-based Spectrum +3 being the final model.



04 January 1985
■ Argus Press releases *Alien*, based on the chest-bursting, face-hugging movie. In space no one can eat ice cream… or something.



03 January 1986
■ Ultimate Play The Game and its back catalogue are sold to US Gold. Goodbye *Sabre Wulf*, hello *Bubbler*!



01 January 2004
■ A new quarterly magazine from Live Publishing focusing on the world of retro gaming appears. **Retro Gamer** is born!



31 December 2000
■ New Year's Eve joy arrives in the form of the UK release of *Pokémon Stadium* on the N64.



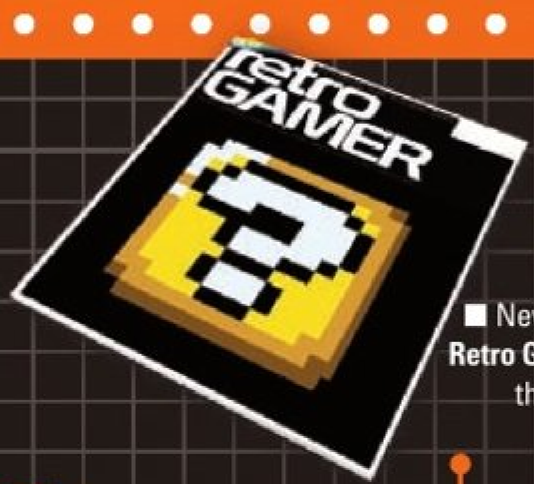
06 January 1977
■ Commodore unveils its latest computer, the Commodore Pet. It sells extremely well in North America.



06 January 1983
■ Melbourne House helps a little blue blob called Horace to go skiing on the Spectrum. Mind that tree.



06 January 2011
■ The Consumer Electronics Show (CES) held in Las Vegas begins its four-day extravaganza of all things techie.



06 Jan 2011
■ New issue of **Retro Gamer** hits the streets.

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BACK TO THE EIGHTIES



» [PC-Engine] The Fantasy Zone comes to the PC-Engine and is one of the best conversions available. Get ready!

CHARTS

JAN 1989



AMSTRAD

1. Joe Blade II (Players)
2. Bomb Jack (Encore)
3. Daley Thompson's Olympics (Ocean)
4. Kikstart 2 (Mastertronic)
5. Air Wolf (Encore)

» [Spectrum] Anything could happen in the next half hour. Coincidentally the loading time of *Thunderbirds* on the Spectrum.





JANUARY 1989 – dead Dragon, Space Harrier revs its PC-Engine, Freescape goes Stateside, Ocean is Untouchable, Thunderbirds are go, disky business for Konix while Boots bans ninja rubber toy fun. Richard Burton dons his hood and takes aim…

THE LATEST NEWS FROM JANUARY 1989

A new year it may be, but for Dragon Publications it wasn't a happy one with the news that its *Dragon User* magazine was to cease publication after 69 issues. To be honest, it did well to keep going that long…

For fans of the PC-Engine there was news to warm the cockles of your heart and relieve your wallet of your cash with the long-awaited release of *Space Harrier* on the system. If you wanted a version that was nigh-on pixel perfect to the original coin-op then this was the version you were after. Of course, the system was still only officially available in Japan, and had been for well over a year, meaning that UK gamers would have to delve into the murky waters of the grey import market for their Fantasy Zone pleasures.

Also available was *The Legendary Axe* by Victor Interactive. An original release rather than a conversion, it was very similar in style to *Rastan Saga*, with a lot of sword slashing and platform jumping. Once again it was only available in Japan, but such was its popularity that it became a launch title for the TurboGrafx-16 when it was released in America in August 1989.

Incentive Software celebrated with the news that it had clinched a deal with Epyx to exclusively distribute its top-selling Freescape games, *Driller* and *Dark Side*, in America. With advance orders of Incentive's first US release, *Space Station Oblivion* – that's *Driller* in UK money – already totalling $500,000, there was certainly reason to be optimistic.

Ocean Software had been going through something of a purple patch of late, producing a lucrative set of games including *RoboCop*, *Batman* and *Operation Wolf*. It continued with its penchant for movie tie-ins by announcing that it had acquired the licence to produce a game based on *The Untouchables*, the gangster movie starring Kevin Costner and Sean Connery that had been released well over a year before. Would it be something that gamers were interested in by the time it was released and, more importantly, would it be any good? The answer would be yes on both counts.

Ocean also had two coin-op conversions in the pipeline lined up for its Imagine label: Data East's *Dragon Ninja* and Konami's racer *WEC Le Mans*. *Dragon Ninja* would be the usual scrolling beat-'em-up affair, not dissimilar to *Double Dragon* in style, while *WEC Le Mans* would be a typical stage-based racing game. Most home computer versions of the games were acceptable, bar the notable exception of *WEC Le Mans* on the Commodore 64, which proved to be slightly less playable than a burst space hopper.

Grandslam promised much with its much-vaunted release based on Gerry Anderson's classic puppet TV show, *Thunderbirds*. The arcade

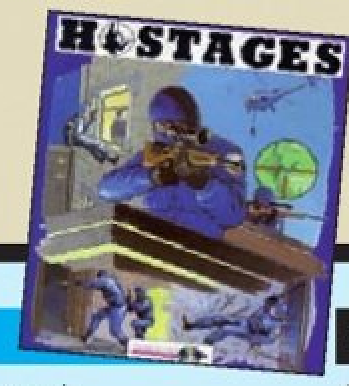


» [Commodore 64] You can't be throwing those rubbery things around in Boots… or that special edition shuriken.



» [Amiga] It's *Space Station Oblivion* to the Americans. In the UK it's the Freescape game *Driller*.







AMIGA

1. Rocket Ranger (Mirrorsoft)
2. Battle Chess (Electronic Arts)
3. Interceptor (Electronic Arts)
4. Menace (Psyclapse)
5. Star Glider 2 (Rainbird)

ATARI ST

1. Hostages (Infogrames)
2. Elite (Firebird)
3. Menace (Psyclapse)
4. STOS Game Creator (Mandarin)
5. 1943 (US Gold)

MUSIC

1. Especially For You (Kylie & Jason)
2. Crackers International EP (Erasure)
3. Something's Gotten Hold Of My Heart (Marc Almond featuring Gene Pitney)
4. The Living Years (Mike & The Mechanics)
5. Buffalo Stance (Neneh Cherry)

» [Amiga] Elliott Ness takes on Al Capone in Ocean's interpretation of *The Untouchables*. Good it was too…



» [Commodore 64] Most conversions of *WEC Le Mans* were fine. However, the C64 version whiffed like a decomposing skunk.



adventure would see all the cast and ships feature in a battle against their arch nemesis, the Hood, who is holding International Rescue to ransom. It proved to be a better offering than Firebird's puzzle-based *Thunderbirds* game from 1986 and sold well on all systems.

There were reports that the eagerly awaited console from Konix, the Slipstream – later to be known as the Konix Multisystem – would be out in the summer, with its software format of choice being disk-based rather than on cartridge. A range of 3D titles were also being created, which would be used in conjunction with a new helmet peripheral.

Then, of course, there was the hydraulic chair that had become a symbol of the potential of the machine. Needless to say, the story of the Slipsteam had a fair distance still to run, with no happy ending at the finish.

Software house System 3 had got itself into trouble with the UK's leading purveyor of condoms, cotton buds and cough mixture: Boots. System 3 had released a special limited edition of *The Last Ninja 2*, which contained a ninja mask and a rubber shuriken throwing star. Boots objected to the shuriken being included and refused to stock the title. Other retailers weren't quite as indignant about the rubber-based weapon but felt the need to add a warning sticker to the packaging.

Hyperbole of the month must surely go to the spokesman for MSX who was cranking up the marketing machine for the new wave of MSX2 computers. With the original machine hardly causing a ripple, let alone a wave, of enthusiasm in the UK, focus shifted to the graphical capabilities of the new systems being produced by Sony, Panasonic and Sanyo. According to the spokesman, the graphics would be of such a standard that "they are impossible to distinguish from normal TV… we're talking real life". This was, of course, complete guff.

Retro fans were glad to see that Cascade Games was still persevering with its compilation releases. Having not released a Cassette 50 for several years, the company focused its energy on the Atari ST and promised to produce *Disk 15*, including such interesting and varied games as *Backgammon* and *City Bomber*, and all for £19.95, with PC and Amiga versions promised. Alas, the games were still hopeless and there was no free calculator digital watch this time around…

Computer & Video Games' reviews section once again covered a wide-ranging selection of games, with *RoboCop* (Ocean, Spectrum) blowing the rest of the competition away, becoming *C&VG* Game of the Month. Among the smorgasbord of other gaming titbits that rated highly with *C&VG* were *Thunder Blade* (US Gold, Spectrum), *Lombard RAC Rally* (Mandarin, Atari ST), *Falcon* (Mirrorsoft, Atari ST), *Battle Chess* (Electronic Arts, Amiga), *Colossus X* (CDS, Atari ST), *Neuromancer* (Electronic Arts, C64), *Times Of Lore* (Origin Systems, C64), *Castlevania* (NES, Konami) and *Top Gun* (NES, Konami).

JANUARY 1989 NEWS



» One of Salvador Dali's surrealist works showed a liking for lollies and retro gaming.

8 January saw a Boeing 747 crash onto the M1 motorway near Kegworth, Leicestershire, killing 47 passengers. The British Midland flight, which had been destined for Belfast, was diverted for an emergency landing after one of its engines caught fire. On its descent to the runway the second engine also appeared to fail and the 747 crashed into a motorway embankment just a few hundred yards from the runway.

It was later found by the UK Air Accident Team that the crash had been hastened by the captain and first officer shutting down the wrong engine, which had been operating fine. Both survived the crash but were dismissed.

On 20 January George HW Bush was inaugurated as the new President of the United States, succeeding the outgoing president, Ronald Reagan. Dan Quayle was also sworn in as his vice president. Laughs aplenty were brewing…

American serial killer Ted Bundy was executed by electric chair in Florida on 24 January. After years of denials, Bundy finally admitted killing over 30 people between 1974 and 1978. He was tried, found guilty of murder and sentenced to death in February 1980. A mere nine years later the chair finally beckoned…

23 January saw the passing of the surrealist artist Salvador Dali at the age of 84. Often remembered for painting floppy clocks and elephants with elongated stilt-like legs, he also designed the logo for Chupa Chups lollies. Now that is surreal…

THIS MONTH IN…

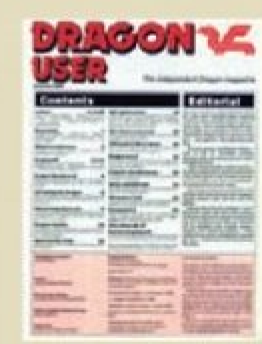
ST/AMIGA FORMAT



Palace Software's Shoot-'Em-Up Construction Kit was reviewed and did well. More interesting was the rumour that Palace's own *Barbarian II* had been created with SEUCK. This was not true, although it did use a customised version to create the backgrounds.



DRAGON USER



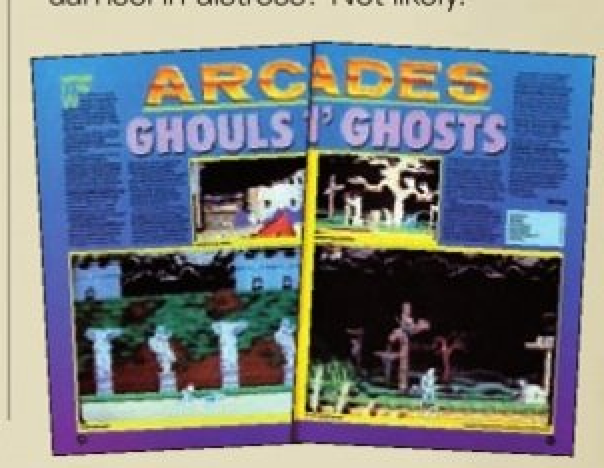
It's sad to see a magazine fold, but *Dragon User* was hard work with its text-intensive layout – just one picture this month. With a handful of reviews and riveting features including 'Eprom Switching In A DeltaDOS Cartridge', saying goodbye was probably for the best.



COMMODORE USER



CU's arcade round-up noted the release of *Ghouls 'N Ghosts* from Capcom. The sequel to *Ghosts 'N Goblins* saw more supernatural levels filled with all manner of death. With a demanding learning curve, could you save the damsel in distress? Not likely.



BACK TO THE NINETIES



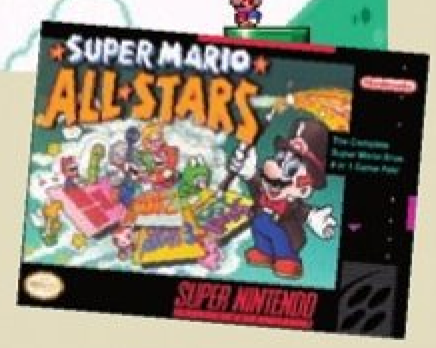
» [NES] Rare released a belated sequel to its original *RC Pro-Am* game and, although fun, it won't blow your socks off.

» [Mega Drive] Intended for a worldwide release, *Golden Axe III* never made it out of Japan…



» [SNES] The start of a beautiful thing – the first screen of the newly revamped first *Super Mario Bros* game.







THE LATEST NEWS FROM JULY 1993

JULY 1993 – Sonic is back again, RC Pro-Am too, Golden Axe III axed, Super Mario All-Stars arrives, CD-i Zelda deal done while Impact splits its Sega magazine in two. Richard Burton debates whether to go Master or Mega…

One of Rare's earliest NES releases, the 1988 game *RC Pro-Am*, received good reviews and sold by the barrow load, so it was surprising that it took over five years for a sequel to arrive. Available initially in the USA was *RC Pro-Am 2*, featuring more of the same racing but with the added feature of being able to upgrade your car by means of collecting money found on the track.

Although still an enjoyable game, it hadn't evolved much from the original. Yes, there were upgrades and better track designs, but after such a long gap between releases, gamers expected something a bit meatier. In single-player mode it was passable, but in four-player mode it really came into its own, providing excellent gaming despite its lack of originality.

For fans of Sega and all things *Sonic The Hedgehog*, good times were ahead. The development of *Sonic 3* was forging ahead, and Sega tentatively announced a pre-Christmas release for the lucrative franchise.

For gamers with pockets full of loose change and an arcade in the immediate vicinity, the news that Sega was releasing an arcade version of *Sonic* came as a surprise. The bizarrely titled *SegaSonic The Hedgehog* would prove to be a very different animal to any other *Sonic* game.

The three-player game would feature Sonic and two new characters: Mighty the armadillo and Ray the flying squirrel, with the method of control being a trackball. The premise of the game was simple: the three characters have been kidnapped by Dr Robotnik and trapped on his island, which they must escape while avoiding umpteen traps and outrunning constant waves of molten lava, buzzsaws and collapsing platforms. The game itself was different in style, as it took on an isometric viewpoint. You still had to collect rings, although this was to maintain your health.

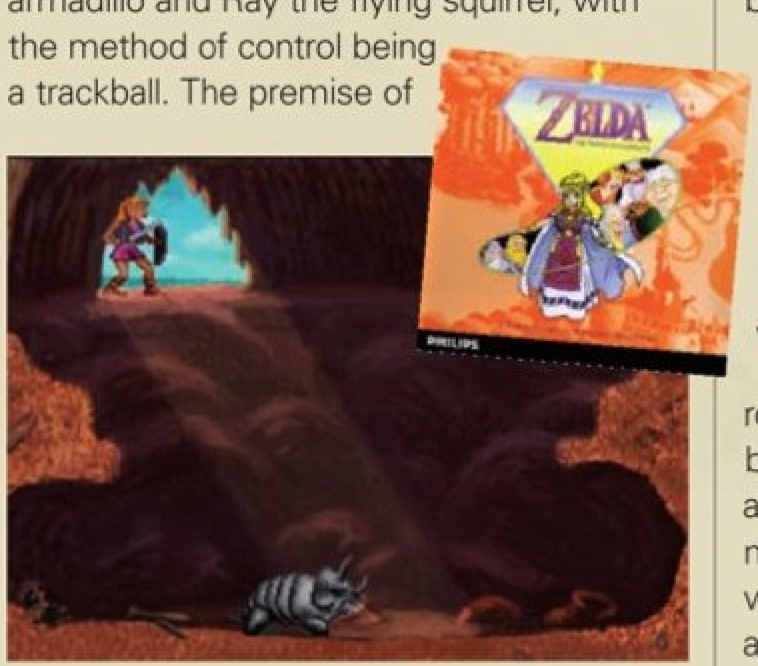
It was released in Japan and had a limited release in Europe, but never really ignited the interest as console *Sonic* had managed to. The gameplay was more akin to *Marble Madness* than the *Sonic* platform formula we were used to and suffered because of it. It was an interesting foray into arcade game territory for Sega and *Sonic*, but ultimately its core fan base just didn't like it.

Just released in Japan was *Golden Axe III* for the Mega Drive. The latest instalment of the hack-and-slash arcade adventure had new features such as stage branching so that you could take a different route at the end of each level, rather than being forced down a linear route. It also added replay value to the game, as did the new two-player co-operation feature, but was it a game you would want to plug in again and again?

Sega answered that question by taking the decision that *Golden Axe III* wouldn't



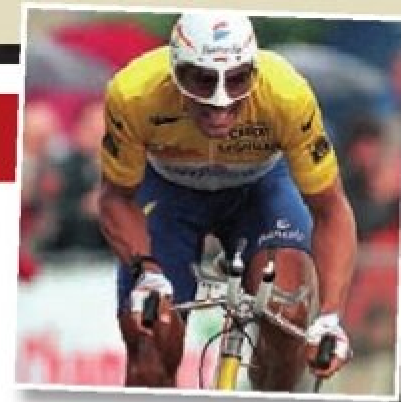
» [Arcade] *Sonic* hits the arcades in this strange trap avoidance game. It's not the *Sonic* we know and love…



» [CD-i] *Zelda* on the Philips CD-i? That's good news, isn't it? Disappointing doesn't even begin to cover it…

CHARTS

JULY 1993 NEWS



» Miguel Indurain powers on to a third Tour victory with a further two to follow.

25 July saw the Spanish cyclist Miguel Indurain win his third Tour de France in a row. 'Big Mig' would later go on to become the first rider to win five consecutive Tours.

On 29 July, an Israeli court overturned the conviction of John Demjanjuk, believed to be one of the most notorious Nazi death camp guards. Nicknamed Ivan The Terrible, he was accused of being responsible for operating the gas chamber in the Treblinka Camp in Poland, where over 850,000 Jews were killed. His previous conviction and death sentence for Nazi atrocities was overturned, with the court stating that there was reasonable doubt regarding his identity. However, the judge also stated that there was sufficient evidence to prove he was a guard at other camps.



» Arnie plays it for laughs in this parody of the action movie genre he made his own.

On a lighter note, 30 July saw Arnold Schwarzenegger's latest premiere in the UK. *Last Action Hero* had Arnie self-deprecating in this spoof of action flicks. Although the storyline was cheesy, involving a young lad winning a magic cinema ticket that takes him through the screen into the movie world and the bad guys from the movie into the real world, the clichés and paradoxes made for a clever movie that never took itself too seriously.

be given a US or UK release, even though the in-game text was written in English, indicating that it originally intended a more widespread release…

SNES owners were in for a treat with news of a *Super Mario Bros* compilation, due out imminently. *Super Mario All-Stars* brought together the three NES games along with *Super Mario Bros: The Lost Levels*. They were then given a graphical makeover while keeping the original level designs but also incorporated a host of hidden extras. It was released in Japan on 21 July as *Super Mario Collection* and arrived in the UK in December, proving to be a gaming essential and an instant classic.

Impact Magazines decided to take the bold move of splitting its existing magazine, *Sega Force*, into two separate entities after 19 issues. The July issue would be the last before the split, when it would be divided into *Sega Master Force* and *Sega Force Mega*, giving dedicated coverage to the Master System and Mega Drive. Game Gear owners would get an identical section in both magazines. Impact also debuted another new face on the newsstand with the release of *SNES Force*.





» [SNES] *Super Bomberman* arrives on the SNES. A great game in single-player but magnificent with four players.

Philips and its CD-i entertainment system pulled off a major coup this month by securing the rights from Nintendo to release new *Zelda* titles. The first two had already been named as *Zelda: The Wand Of Gamelon* and *Link: The Faces Of Evil*, to be developed by Animation Magic. Unfortunately, these were far removed from the quality of the Nintendo-produced *Legend Of Zelda* titles, with Animation Magic managing to create games lacking in both magic and animation.

The gaming press thought the decision to grant a licence to produce CD-based games using one of the most recognisable franchises peculiar, considering that Nintendo was reportedly getting closer to the launch of its own CD-based add-on for the SNES. Did it know something the rest of us didn't?

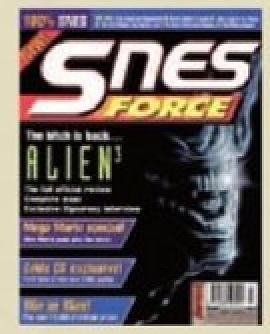
Super Play magazine ran its rule over the latest SNES games, including both import and UK releases. Top of the pile in the percentage scoring was *Super Bomberman* (Hudson Soft), with *Alien 3* (Acclaim), *Namcot Open* (Namco), *Buster Busts Loose* (Konami), *Starwing* (Nintendo), *Cybernator* (Konami), *Batman Returns* (Konami) and *Super NBA Basketball* (Tecmo) trailing in just behind.

Sega Force rated the latest Mega Drive releases, with *The Flintstones* (Sega), *MiG-29* (Domark), *Jungle Strike* (Electronic Arts) and *Sunset Riders* (Konami) coming out on top.

For Amiga gamers, the *Amiga Power* team scrutinised and pondered July's releases, including *The Lost Vikings* (Interplay), *Morph* (Millennium), *Battle '93* (Blue Byte), *Reach For The Skies* (Virgin Games), *Trolls 1200* (Flair) and the re-released *Rodland* (Kixx).

THIS MONTH IN…

SNES FORCE



The first issue of *SNES Force* ran a feature on the newly released *Mario Bros* movie. Although no review was forthcoming, Bob Hoskins (Mario) was quoted as saying: "I didn't like the script at first and really didn't want to do another kids' film." All bodes well, then…



AMIGA FORCE



What's the worst game on the Amiga? *AF* asked the industry's leading lights and got a mix of answers. David Braben (*Elite*) thought *Shadow Of The Beast* was awful while Peter Molyneux (*Populous*) gave *Defender Of The Crown* a slating, with a 'looked nice but no game' observation.



AMSTRAD ACTION

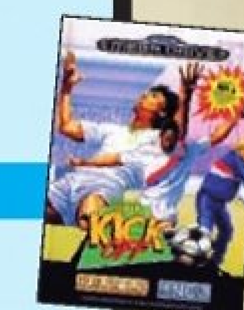


AA reviewed *Prehistorik 2* by Titus, uncovering one of the best games on the CPC. This title had superb graphics and excellent sound, which were enhanced by the parallax scrolling and enhanced DMA sound facilities on the CPC Plus version. A PC version was to follow…



JULY 1993

MEGA DRIVE



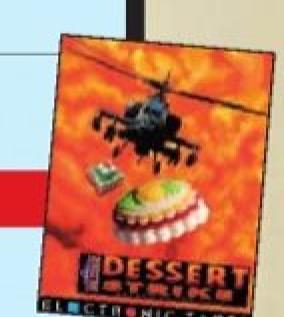
1. Super Kick Off (US Gold/Anco)
2. Another World (Virgin/Delphine)
3. PGA Tour Golf II (Electronic Arts)
4. Tiny Toons Adventures: Buster's Hidden Treasure (Konami)
5. Road Rash II (Electronic Arts)

SNES



1. Desert Strike (Electronic Arts)
2. Super Mario Kart (Nintendo)
3. Tiny Toons Adventures: Buster Busts Loose (Konami)
4. Mickey's Magical Quest (Capcom)
5. PGA Tour Golf (Electronic Arts)

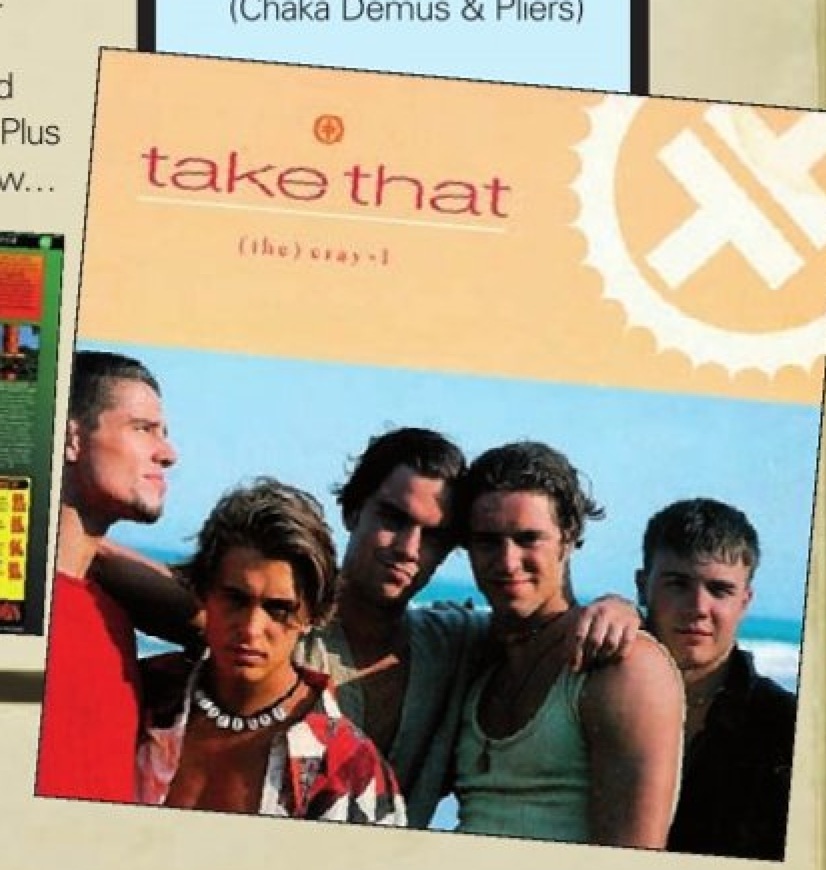
AMIGA



1. Desert Strike (Electronic Arts)
2. Body Blows (Team 17)
3. Alien Breed: Special Edition 92 (Team 17)
4. The Chaos Engine (Renegade/Mindscape)
5. Premier Manager (Gremlin)

MUSIC

1. Pray (Take That)
2. Dreams (Gabrielle)
3. What's Up? (4 Non Blondes)
4. What Is Love (Haddaway)
5. Tease Me (Chaka Demus & Pliers)





RETROBATE PROFILE

» **NAME:** MICHAEL LEVY
» **JOINED:** 6 OCTOBER 2008
» **LOCATION:** CHESHIRE
» **OCCUPATION:** JOURNALIST
» **FAVE GAME SYSTEM:** NES

Castlevania Legends

THE GIRL FROM BEL MONTE, SHE SAY YES!

#32



» GAME BOY
» KONAMI
» 1997

It seems Sonia Belmont just can't catch a break. She's been ripped from the *Castlevania* lore as the first Belmont to not only become a lead character but also the first female Belmont as well. She was supposed to make her debut in *Castlevania Resurrection* for the Sega Dreamcast, only to have her hopes and digital dreams nailed back into the coffin. All we have as proof of the female vampire killer is her starring role in *Castlevania Legends* for the Game Boy.

The year is 1450, and we journey to the land of Transylvania. In *Legends*, Sonia joins forces with a non-playable son of Dracula, Alucard, to defeat the lord of darkness. Though there is romantic tension between the two, there is fierce rivalry as well. Eventually, Sonia defeats Dracula, and swears to raise her family to fight the vampire king in an eternal struggle between good and evil.

The cruelest evil, however, is the fact that the series takes a step backwards with this rendition. The last of the original Game Boy trilogy, this release is plagued with problems that not even the strongest of weapons can cure.

Sonia is brutally slow in this game, right on par with Christopher in *Castlevania: The Adventure*. The magic system introduced offers Sonia five soul weapons to use throughout her adventure. Utilising Ice, Wind, Fire, Saint and Magic, the game's sub-weapons are unique and varied.

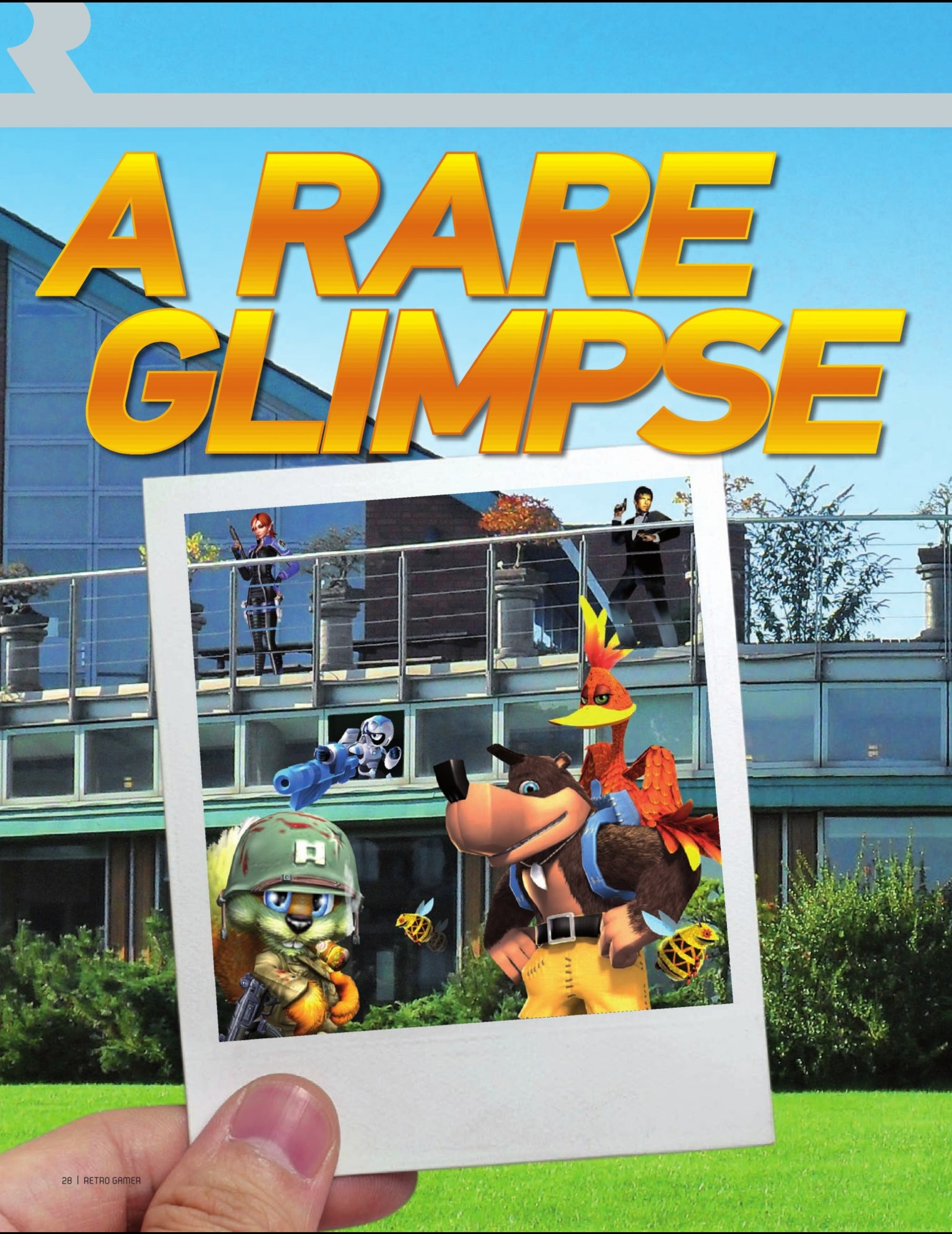
Bosses are the atypical for Dracula's partners in crime. Medusa, Minotaur, Death… they're all here. Even fighting Alucard is a treat. Boss battles feel too easy at times, and the level layouts to get to these enemies feel a bit off balance and not varied enough.

While the tracks on *Belmont's Revenge* were much more memorable, *Legends* has some excellent classic *Castlevania* tunes, and they are better than *Adventure*'s by a long shot. The tracks use quick arpeggios and harpsichord melodies, and oozes with the familiar songs to match the atmosphere of the experience.

Despite Sonia not getting a fair shot at glory, *Legends* is worth checking out. It soars for high prices on auction websites, but is a decent addition to your Game Boy library. Just be sure to pick up *Belmont's Revenge* first. Though Koji Igarashi has publicly removed the game and all traces of Sonia from the Belmont legacy, the morale of *Castlevania* fans still keeps Sonia's memory alive. *

Want to appear in the magazine? Be sure to upload your classic profiles at www.retrogamer.net

A RARE GLIMPSE







» Brendan Gunn



» George Andreas



» Gregg Mayles



» Nick Burton

As the celebrations for Rare's 25th anniversary come to an end, an important new chapter for the Twycross studio begins with Kinect: the end of a two-year project to help the Xbox tap in to the burgeoning motion-control game market. Always fashionably late to the party, Retro Gamer speaks with some of Rare's oldest guard and reflects on the past 25 years of Britain's most enduring and popular software house

Located in Ashby, Rare's base of operations is found down an unassuming country road. The building is Rare's second home, and was designed to look and feel reminiscent of its first: an old farmhouse a few minutes up the road. Indeed, it's not until you finally enter the reception area that it really hits you how proud it is of its heritage. A glass cabinet houses various awards and gold BAFTA masks, while others exhibit Rare games, merchandise, arcade boards, and all sorts of treasures that would take pride of place in any retro collection. Attention is also drawn to a lustrous cloth mural that hangs on the wall. A gift from Nintendo, it's an unusual totem to watch over the studio and remind visitors of the strong connection that both companies share.

Taking all of this in, we were reminded of the impressive things that Rare has achieved in its 25-year existence: it was the first Western developer for Nintendo's NES, was granted control over one of Nintendo's most revered characters, and was largely responsible for the console market's current obsession with FPS games. Spotting an Xbox 360 pod, we thought of the sad truth that, despite releasing a number of inventive, fun and characteristic games this generation, many fans have felt like Rare has shown signs of being past it, possibly provoked by a combination of events: the end of its alliance with Nintendo, Chris and Tim Stamper's departure in 2007, a noticeable reduction in the game output in recent years, and doubts surrounding Kinect and the autonomy of the studio under the Microsoft Game Studios umbrella.

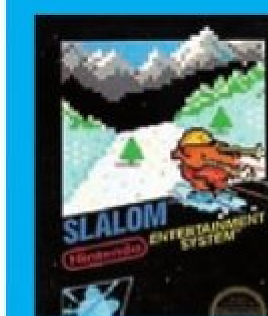
During our visit, though, it became clear that Rare's recent drop in activity has been for a logical reason: it has been working with Microsoft to help shape the Xbox experience for consumers – first through Avatars and now by helping them connect to motion-controlled games. Traditionally, Rare has always supported a core platform, always worked closely with platform holders, and always relished the challenges of utilising new technology to enhance the medium. These are the aspects that have always set the studio apart, and in all these respects things appear to be business as usual.

Rare's communications manager Nick Burton, creative director George Andreas, senior software engineer Brendan Gunn, and lead designer Gregg Mayles sat down with Stuart Hunt to discuss and reflect on the last 25 years of the studio, granting him a rare and enlightening glimpse inside one of the industry's most respected and best-loved developers.



ROB 64 was named after the NES peripheral.

RARE TIMELINE



Slalom
Year Released: 1987
System: NES

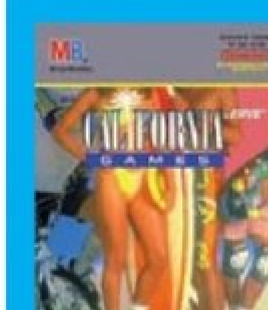
Wizards & Warriors
Year Released: 1987
System: NES

Anticipation
Year Released: 1988
System: NES

Jeopardy!
Year Released: 1988
System: NES

RC Pro-Am
Year Released: 1988
System: NES

Wheel Of Fortune
Year Released: 1988
System: NES



California Games
Year Released: 1989
System: NES

Cobra Triangle
Year Released: 1989
System: NES

Hollywood Squares
Year Released: 1989
System: NES

Ironsword: Wizards & Warriors II
Year Released: 1989
System: NES

Jeopardy! Junior Edition
Year Released: 1989
System: NES

John Elway's Quarterback
Year Released: 1989
System: NES

Jordan vs Bird: One On One
Year Released: 1989
System: NES



Marble Madness
Year Released: 1989
System: NES



Rare's HQ is a far cry from the old farmhouse, but it's still close by and retains the relatively unassuming charm.



Retro Gamer: Thanks for giving up your time to speak to us. Can you tell us a little about what Rare was like when you first joined the company?

Brendan Gunn: It really was a small family company. You'd know absolutely everyone.

RG: Did Tim and Chris [Stamper] carry out the interviews?

BG: Yes. Tim and Chris interviewed me, and Mark Betteridge was sat in the background playing *R-Type* on the PC-Engine. Carole [Stamper] came in and brought us some coffee, so yeah, it really was a small sort of family-run business.

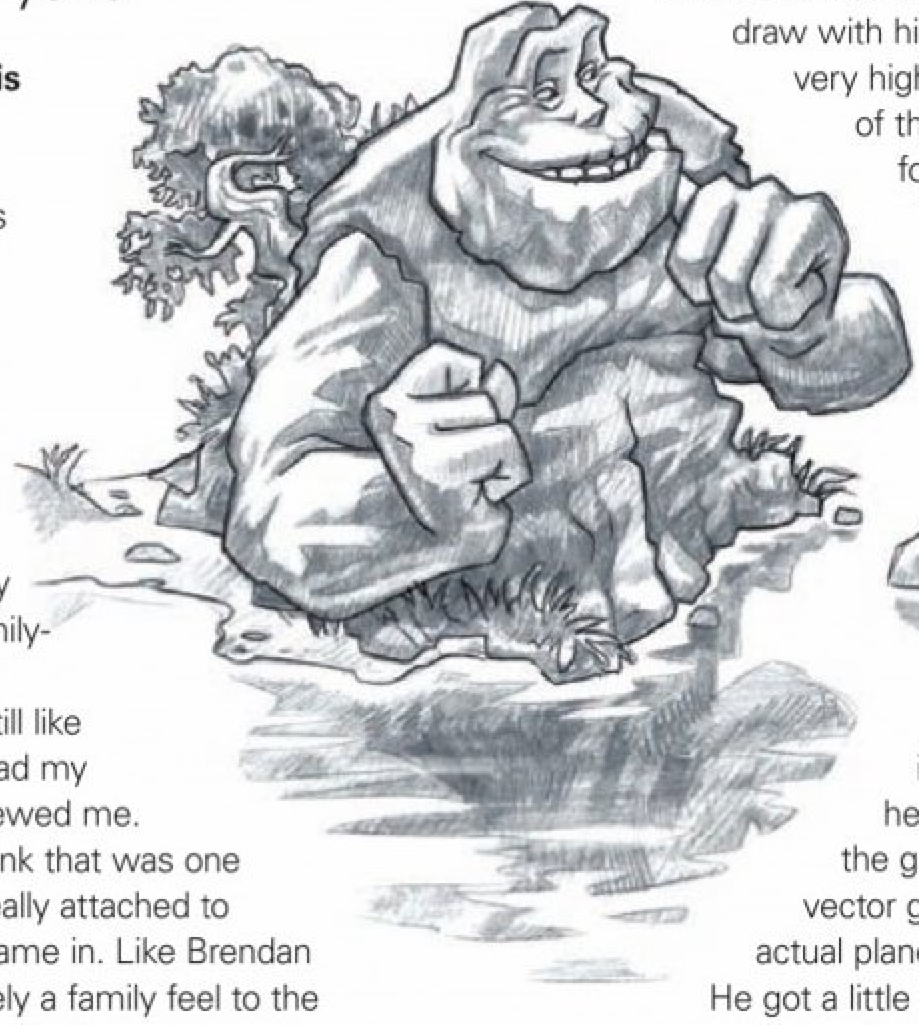
Nick Burton: It was still like that, actually, when I had my interview. Chris interviewed me.

George Andreas: I think that was one of the reasons I was really attached to the company when I came in. Like Brendan said, there was definitely a family feel to the whole place. Everyone knew everyone, and there weren't many people there at the beginning. But I had Tim doing my interview and it just felt like a home. Rare was actually originally based in their old home as well, just up the road in an old farmhouse. The rooms were converted into development areas and it definitely felt like a home. It's not quite like that today; Rare is part of a much bigger machine now.

RG: Can you tell us about Tim and Chris? What were they like as individuals and bosses?

BG: Really strong individuals. Tim, especially, I think really felt like a boss; you were always a little wary of him. But no, they were really great, clever people and really good to work with. When I started we didn't have designers as such. Each team was really small, and Tim would come up with a lot of the game ideas and pass them on to the programmers. Back then each team would consist of a programmer and half an artist – you'd share an artist between two projects – and then there was a single musician for the whole company.

GA: For me, Tim was the creative flair. That's not to say Chris didn't have any creative ability at all, but he was certainly the more technical guy, I think. So the two of them together were obviously brothers and could work together very well. There was a little bit of friction between them from time to time, but that was good – it promoted a good spirit amongst themselves and good results. Of all the people I've worked with over the years, and of all the people I've met, I would say that Tim was one of the only people verging on visionary. He could kind of see things years in advance, and was an amazing artist as well. He could draw with his eyes closed almost, and to a very high standard. In fact, he did some of the graphics for *DKC* himself, for the first level, I think it was. They worked very well together. Professionally they offset each other with their ability.



RG: When it came to game development, how hands-on were Tim and Chris? And how did their involvement change as the company grew?

BG: As I said, Tim used to pretty much design the games to a large extent. For instance, for *Captain Skyhawk* he set the basic art direction for the game's isometric, semi-coin-op vector graphics style, and then, for the actual plane model, we built an Airfix F-15. He got a little video camera, a monitor set up, and laid some tracing paper over the screen, and

RARE THROUGH THE YEARS

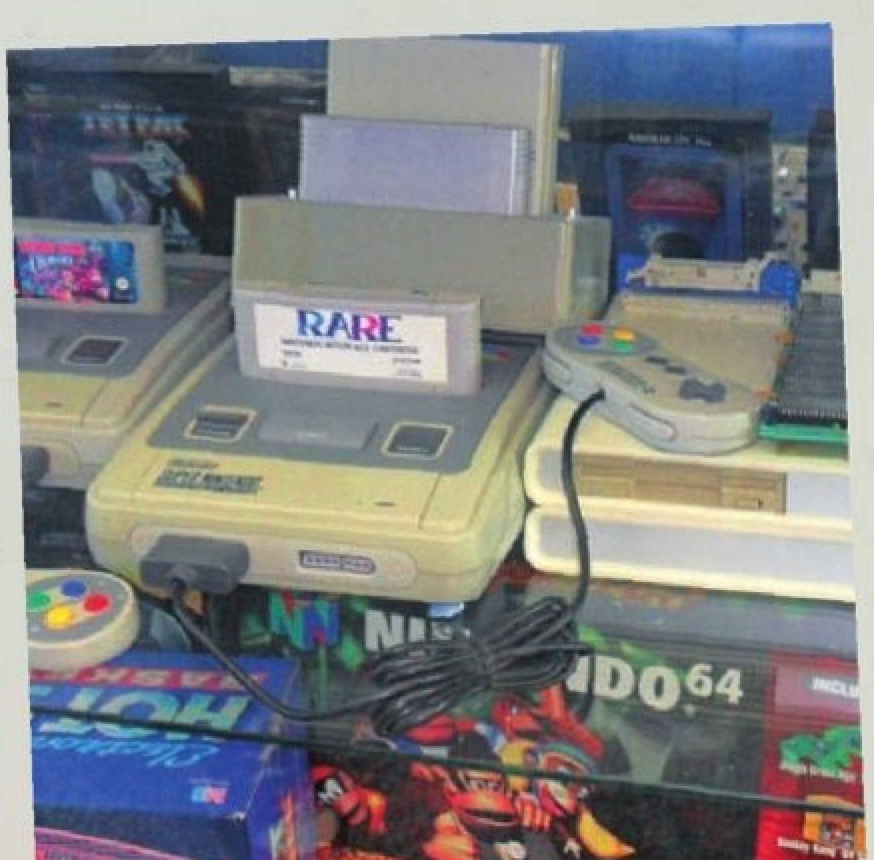


1987

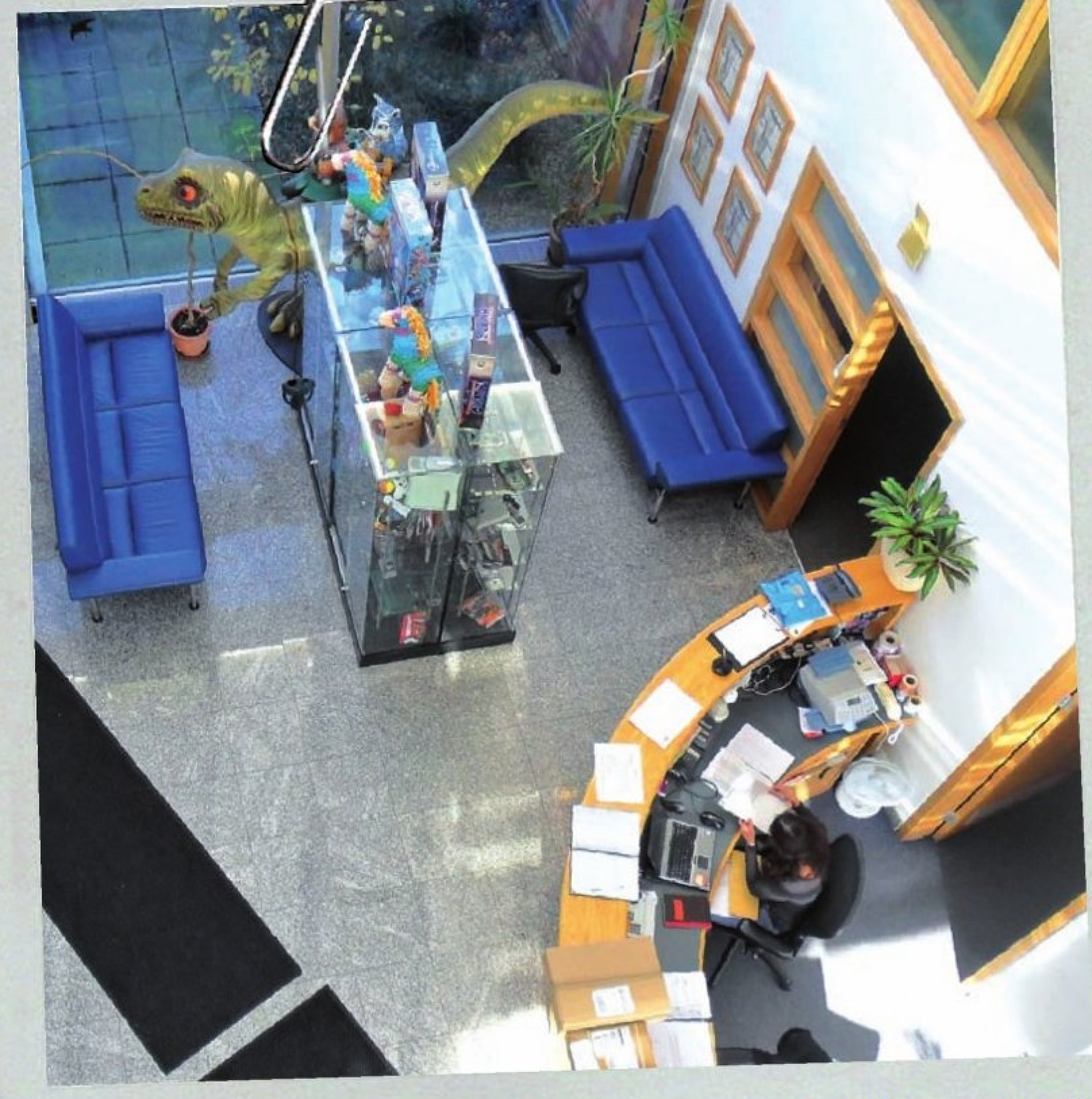
Slalom

Format: NES

Not only Rare's first title for the NES, but Rare's first ever game period. *Slalom* was a fun but quite simplistic skiing-themed racer that brought Rare to the attention of Nintendo. A slick game with a variety of courses and racing types, it showed even then how talented the studio was in getting the most out of the NES.



Offering a potted history of Rare, there are cabinets displaying games and old debug consoles.



When visiting Rare, this is the first place you enter. As you can see, it feels less like a reception and more like a miniature museum. Note the Dinosaur Planet statuette hiding behind the far cabinet, which shows the game's original hero, Sabre, sat atop a dinosaur.

Tim put this plane on a little stand and kept rotating it through the different angles and sketching it on these bits of tracing paper. He actually did every frame of that himself. So yes, he was very much hands-on. Sadly, having done all of that, we realised we couldn't fit it all into the cartridge, and so much of that had to be cut.

GA: Even if he hadn't seen you for days, Tim always had this knack of being able to come into your room, look at what you were working on, and within five minutes suggest one or two things that would completely transform your thinking, and suddenly inject just another element to the idea that you wouldn't have thought of yourself. He had this way of being able to pinpoint a way to make something really good, and he also had a fantastic ability to be able to draw something in a way so that anyone could understand it. He could get his ideas across with very simple sketches.

RG: Do you keep in touch with Tim and Chris, and have they offered their thoughts about how Rare has evolved following their departure?

GA: Since they've left I think they've gone, to be honest. We still bump into them from time to time. They still visit the place where they used to be, so we still see them driving past from time to time, and you wonder, 'What are they doing today?'

NB: I think they've definitely just left and moved on to do what they wanted to do, which is something completely different probably. I've heard all sorts of crazy stories, but not having spoken to them myself… Last I heard Tim was making violins, but who knows?

BG: I actually just spoke to Chris a few weeks ago and he asked how things are going. He said he was looking forward to seeing what we were working on, but didn't offer any views on what we've done. He's obviously happy to leave it in his past.

RG: Did you notice a big change internally at Rare after they left?

GA: They kind of left at a time when things had been running on their own anyway. Obviously there were many people who were close to Tim and Chris. Some people had long friendships with them. They were as much good friends as they were work colleagues, so I think the thing that those people missed was that daily contact: being able to pick up the phone and speak to them whenever they wanted, and get some encouragement or some advice.

BG: It was a bit more of a gradual evolution. The company had changed and they withdrew from being involved in the actual games to the more business side of things, so when they left it barely made any difference with it being such a gradual process.

NB: I think for a lot of people who enter this business, you enter it to make games, and then if they develop away from making games they find themselves doing something they don't necessarily want to do. I'm not saying that's definitely the case with Chris and Tim,

RARE THROUGH THE YEARS



1988

RC Pro-Am

Format: NES

Sticking with 3D racing, *RC Pro-Am* was Rare's first big commercial hit for the NES. An isometric racer themed around radio-controlled cars, it was one of the first games to ever mix racing and combat together. Its frenetic pace and weaponised/upgradable vehicles made it a popular 8-bit racer.



1989

Cobra Triangle

Format: NES

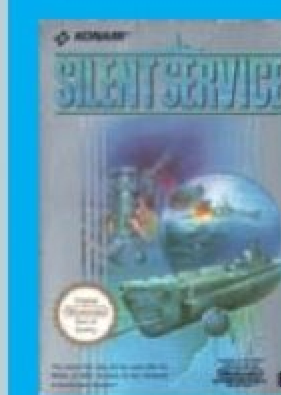
Seen as a spiritual sequel to *RC Pro-Am*, *Cobra Triangle* retained *Pro-Am*'s isometric perspective and racing/combat gameplay, but substituted the RC cars for speedboats. Packed with variety, missions didn't just see you racing to the finish line but also saving swimmers, target shooting and even battling giant sea serpents.



RARE TIMELINE

Sesame Street 1-2-3
Year Released: 1989
System: NES

Sesame Street A-B-C
Year Released: 1989
System: NES



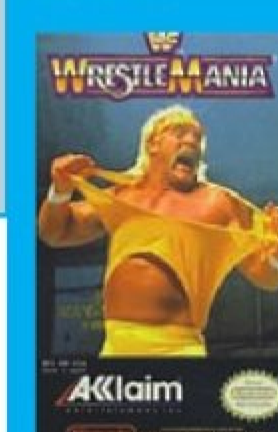
Silent Service
Year Released: 1989
System: NES

Taboo: The Sixth Sense
Year Released: 1989
System: NES

Wheel Of Fortune Junior Edition
Year Released: 1989
System: NES

Who Framed Roger Rabbit
Year Released: 1989
System: NES

World Games
Year Released: 1989
System: NES



WWF WrestleMania
Year Released: 1989
System: NES

A Nightmare On Elm Street
Year Released: 1990
System: NES

Arch Rivals
Year Released: 1990
System: NES

Cabal
Year Released: 1990
System: NES



unless they were here and they could say, but people come into videogames to make videogames.
BG: Obviously we've talked about how creative Tim was, but then we can't forget how brilliant Chris was with the electronics side of things. If you wanted a graphics editor to create stuff for games, most people would get a basic PC with some software on it, but Chris had been designing some arcade board, which he then decided he would turn into a little unit that was going to be for running graphics editing software. I also remember I had a very odd crash bug. I can't remember which game it was now, but I'd spent ages trying to track this bug down and was sure it had to be a software thing. That was until Chris and Tim came round to see if it had been finished, and Chris just knew somehow. He licked his finger, touched a bit at the back of the cartridge and said, 'I bet it won't crash now.'
RG: What were relationships like between the individual development teams back then?
BG: Each team was small, so it didn't take a lot of people to get a few games going at any one time. So yes, we did have an awful lot on the go. But we wouldn't be too involved with what the other games were. Even though you were there with people in the same office, you wouldn't spend very long looking at each other's games because it was almost discouraged, to the point that, later on, when the teams grew, we would be in separate barns at the old place and the doors would be locked. To be honest, we knew very little about what the other games were before they came out.
NB: The first time I saw *Conker* on the N64 was about a week before it went to E3, and I remember thinking, 'Oh my god! It's a dancing, singing poo! What's that all about?' Yes, it wasn't like separate studios, but the games thing, as Brendan says, it was very much like 'Oh, I wonder what they're doing? I wonder what's going on in that barn?', and then some cool stuff would pop out.
GA: I think there was definitely a competitive element at the company, the different teams doing their own things. You would hear on the grapevine that this team is doing such and such, and there was always that kind of competitiveness, with some people wanting to try to subliminally outdo the other teams.

RG: That's surprising. Is it still like that today?

NB: People are more mobile now, in that they would move between teams much more than they would have done back in that era, so that tends to kill some of that. Now you'll get someone who will move onto a new team and then suddenly a load of new graphical effects will appear in a game because they've done those for previous products and have brought them with them.

RG: Can you tell us a little about the development process at Rare and how it's changed?
Gregg Mayles: At the beginning you had such short time periods for those games that you just tended to get going. There was never really a grand master plan; you'd have a think about it for a bit and then literally you would start on it and that's probably as far as the planning went in those days. Even if you got one screenshot, or one drawing, that would probably be enough for us to then say, 'Okay, we could do something with that', or, 'That sounds like a good idea. Let's do something with it.' You could do that back then







If you walk through Rare's reception – look closely and you can see the back of Conker's head – you come out onto this peaceful seating area. That pond is actually home to a giant octopus called Charles. He's camera shy, unfortunately.

RARE THROUGH THE YEARS



1990

Snake Rattle N Roll

Format: NES

Snake Rattle N Roll was a great isometric platformer. Its premise saw you help a hungry snake gannet its way through 'nibbley pibbleys' and pile on enough pounds to ring the weight bell at the top of the stage. The plot was mental but the game ludicrously addictive, particularly in two-player.



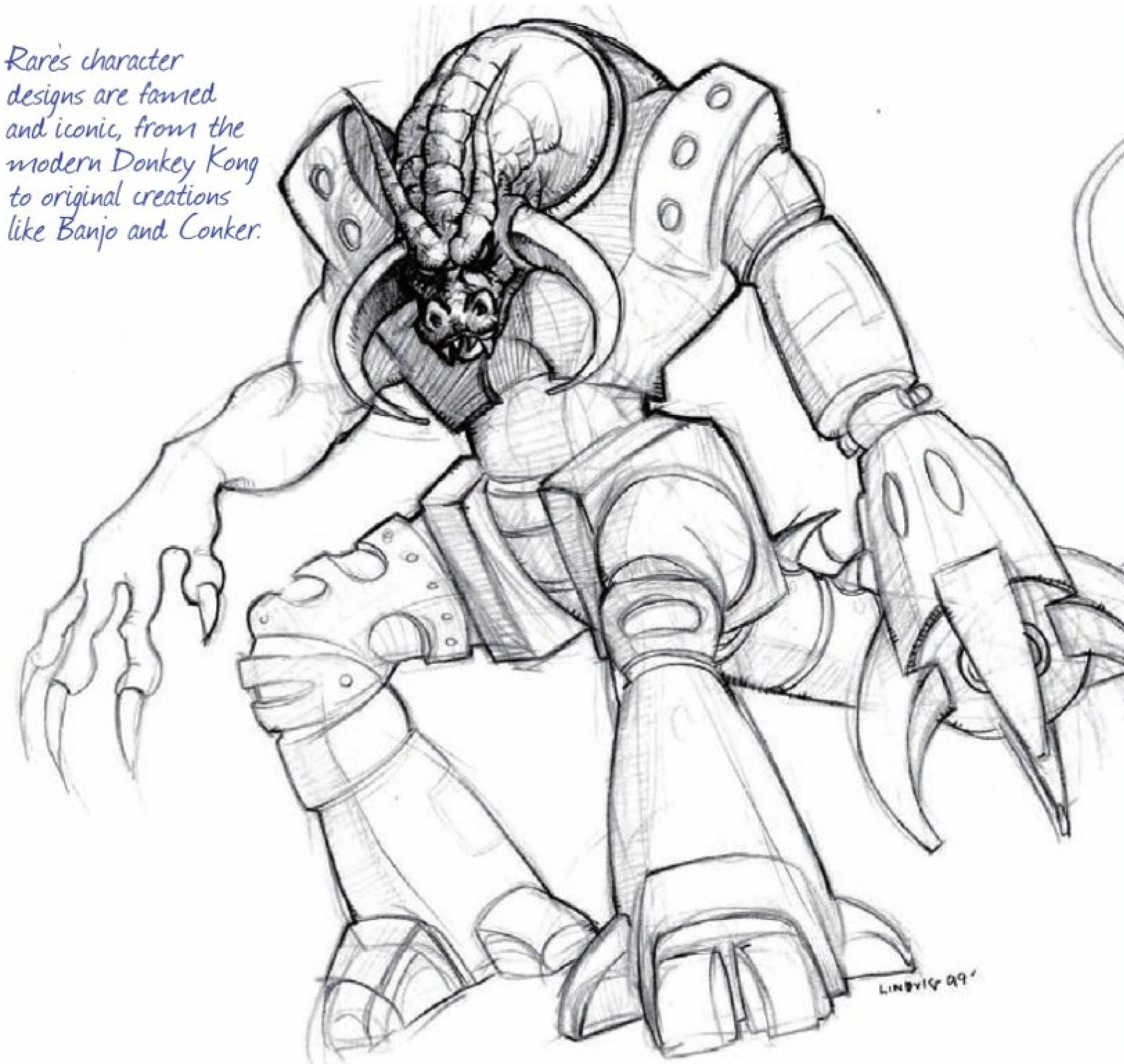
1991

Battletoads

Format: NES

Clearly riding on the coat tails of *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*, Rare's very own version of aquatic superheroes, *Battletoads*, became a success in its own right, spawning a series of games, including a coin-op and a *Double Dragon* crossover, all famed for their great humour, fantastic visuals and notorious difficulty.





Rare's character designs are famed and iconic, from the modern Donkey Kong to original creations like Banjo and Conker.



when there were fewer people and things could move extremely quickly. If it didn't work, it was literally a few hours' work; nowadays you couldn't do that. Well, you could, but you'd soon get chaos. It takes a lot longer to go from an idea to being able to see it and play it, so you have to be a lot more focused on trying to think through all the problems before they happen.

BG: Certainly from a programming point of view, you'd have an idea based on what you'd seen in this other game, and try to incorporate a bit of that. It was such a quick process making games back then. Because it was one programmer, you could just go off and do any part at any time, and just start making something interesting.

GA: It also depended on the game we were doing. It was a mix of licensed and original games back then, and obviously all the licensed stuff had to be finished by a certain date, so you couldn't spend weeks experimenting with wild ideas. For your own IP, like *Banjo* or *Snake Rattle N Roll*, we could take our time, and that was why these games tended to be better.

RG: When creating IP, such as *Snake Rattle N Roll* and *Battletoads*, who would come up with those?

GA: Well, most of them came from Tim Stamper. Certainly both of those two did. He used to work very closely with Mark Betteridge. Mark would do the software and Tim would draw the graphics. Tim pretty much came up with most of the ideas. I'm not sure where the idea for *Snake Rattle N Roll* came from, though.

RG: It's very much like *Marble Madness*, which Rare published on the NES. Perhaps that was how the idea came about?

GM: That's right. That actually was one of the very first games I tested when I worked for the company. I played it in the arcades but never got to grips with the trackball controls. I thought the way [Mark] got it to work on the D-pad was brilliant. It felt really responsive.

BG: Actually, I think where the IP came from was Mark's idea of how we could get a game onto the smallest capacity cartridge possible, and he came up with this idea of how to do the backgrounds very cheaply, with limited storage. Then, having done this quite simplistic background style, he thought about how we could get something to move around on it, and it just evolved into a snake. It was quite common back then for things to get IP attached to them after we had the game idea. Nowadays things are quite different.

RARE THROUGH THE YEARS



1992

Beetlejuice

Format: Game Boy

Not a port of Rare's earlier NES *Beetlejuice* game, but an entirely new side-scrolling platformer linked to the animated television show. Assuming the role of the crazed ghost Beetlejuice, players embarked on a mission to save his kidnapped pal. With all the trappings of typical Nineties licensed platformers, it's nothing special.

RARE TIMELINE

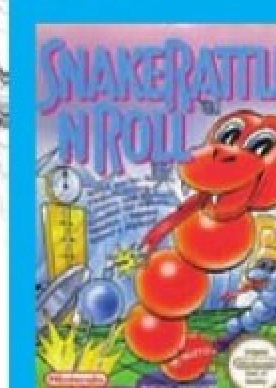
Captain Skyhawk
Year Released: 1990
System: NES

Double Dare
Year Released: 1990
System: NES

Jeopardy! 25th Anniversary Edition
Year Released: 1990
System: NES

Narc
Year Released: 1990
System: NES

Pin*Bot
Year Released: 1990
System: NES



Snake Rattle N Roll
Year Released: 1990
System: NES

Solar Jetman: Hunt For The Golden Warpship
Year Released: 1990
System: NES

Super Glove Ball
Year Released: 1990
System: NES

Super Off Road
Year Released: 1990
System: NES



The Amazing Spider-Man
Year Released: 1990
System: Game Boy

Time Lord
Year Released: 1990
System: NES

Wheel Of Fortune Family Edition
Year Released: 1990
System: NES

Wizards & Warriors Chapter X: The Fortress Of Fear
Year Released: 1990
System: Game Boy

WWF WrestleMania Challenge
Year Released: 1990
System: Game Boy

RG: Speaking of some of your older IPs, do you think you may be tempted to return to any of them one day?

GM: Quite possibly. A few years ago, though we never actually started any work on it, we did have a think about if we were going to do a new *Battletoads* game, what would we do? Literally, a few days' work and it never went any further. It wasn't particularly clear what it could be rather than what it used to be. I mean, we've seen the Turtles try to reinvent themselves a couple of years ago and that sort of fell flat on its face.

RG: Perhaps you could look to the XLBA route.

GM: Yeah, that would probably be a better platform for a game like *Battletoads*. We'd have to keep the old difficulty level, of course. Maybe we could release it as pay-to-play – we'd only have to do one level and you're not allowed to buy the next level until you've finished the last one. [laughs]

NB: I think you might have something there, Gregg. [laughs] It's always one of those difficult things when you reinvent something like that because a good portion of your audience will always want more of the same, but then another portion will be asking why you didn't do something different with it. It just makes it difficult. Like Gregg says, though, never say never.

BG: Here's an exclusive for you: we actually started work on a Super Nintendo version of the *Battletoads* coin-op. I worked on that for a while. We actually got most of the first level done, and I don't know if this was because the coin-op wasn't a massive success or what, but they just canned it there. But it was well under way on the SNES.

GM: I remember working on the coin-op version for quite a long time and it being finished for ages and not being released. I think Electronic Arts picked it up eventually. I remember it was tested in arcades and it tested pretty well. Obviously, it was tested on how much money it made, and it did reasonably well. We could never really understand why it wasn't more successful than it was.

RARE THROUGH THE YEARS

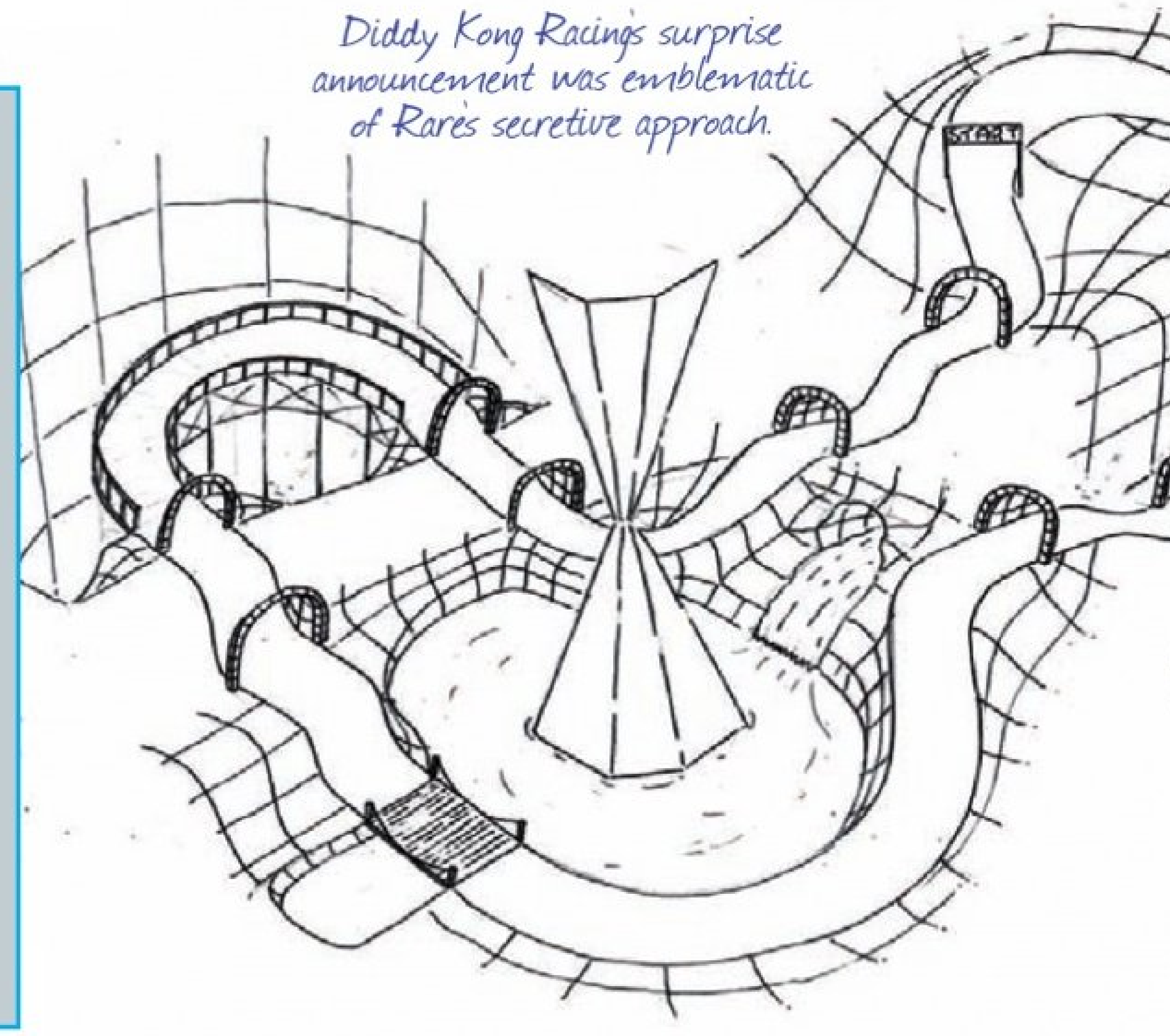


1993

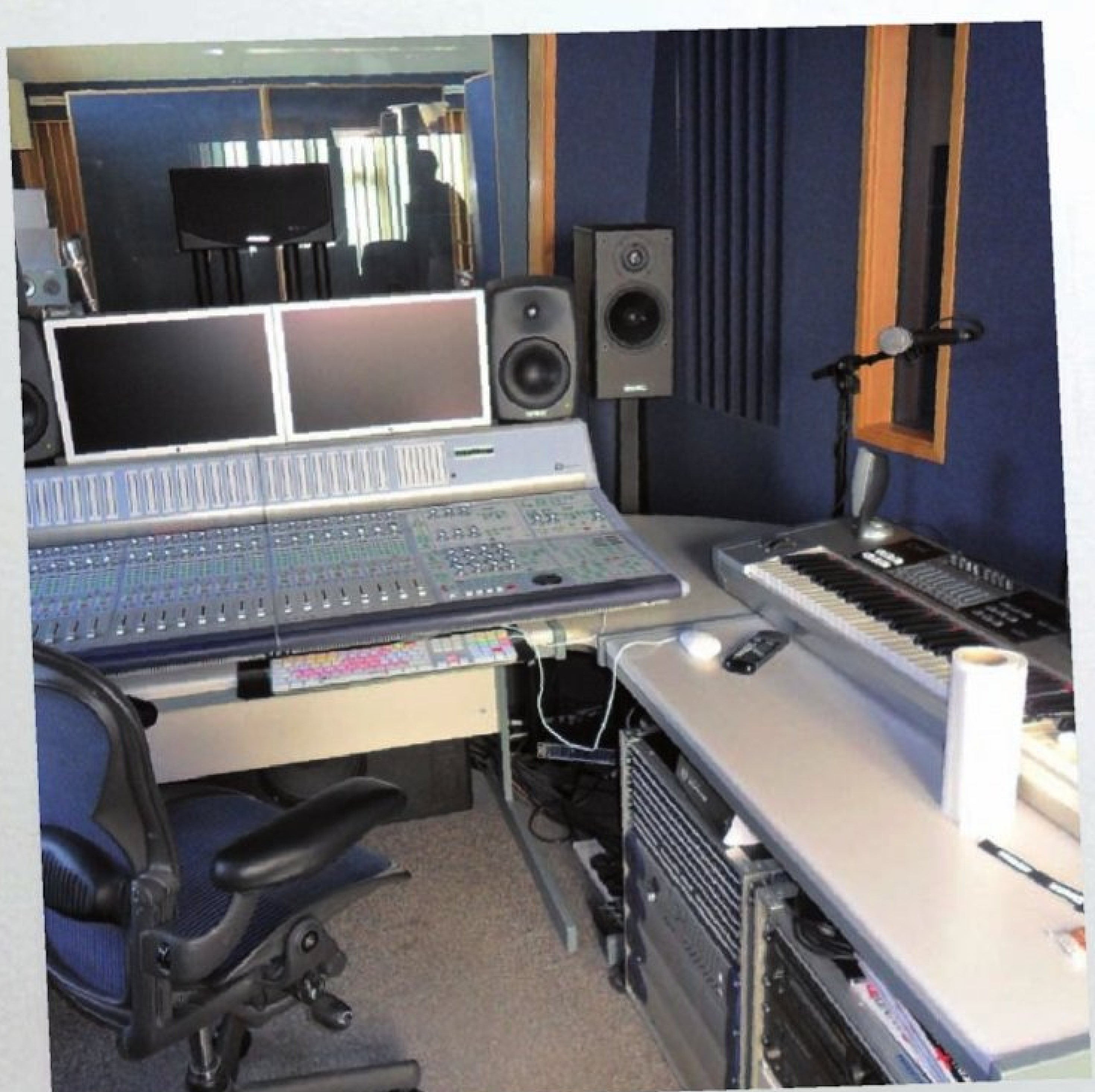
Battletoads & Double Dragon

Format: NES

Two of the most popular beat-'em-up franchises on the NES cross over in Rare's final game for the console. The results of such a marriage should have resulted in a legendary chapter in the book of beat-'em-ups. Sadly, failing to live up to its potential, it remains more curio than classic among Rare and genre fans.



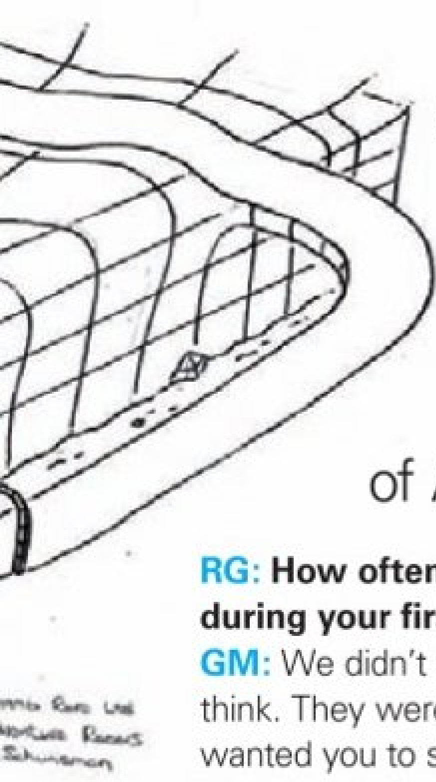
Diddy Kong Racing's surprise announcement was emblematic of Rare's secretive approach.



This is the music studio, and where various soundtracks and voiceovers for Rare games have been recorded over the years. It's also the place where the famous DK Rap was laid down. Actually, if you take a really hard sniff, you can still smell the cheese.

RG: What was your working relationship with Nintendo like, and how did it come about?

GM: We were doing Ultimate, and Tim and Chris could see that the Spectrum was going to die off, so they approached Nintendo in Japan and asked if they could develop for the NES. There had been no Western developer for the console up until that point, so they politely said thanks but no. So Chris reverse-engineered the NES hardware to find out how it all worked. I think we basically put a game together, which was *Slalom*, and then went back to Nintendo with this game. I think they were so impressed that we had gone to the effort of reverse-engineering and then building a game for their console that Rare became the first Western developer for the NES. That's pretty much where it



started. I think for many years Rare had a very close relationship with Minoru Arakawa, who was the founder and president of Nintendo of America.

RG: How often would you speak with Nintendo during your first-party relationship?
GM: We didn't visit Nintendo as often as you might think. They were extremely hands-off. I guess they wanted you to sink or swim, so they treated us not too dissimilar to any of their teams, I guess, where they expected a lot of us and we did our best to deliver and they'd always pass feedback back to our games when they were close to being finished. Nine times out of ten it was spot-on; the comments that were coming in were very good. I mean, with any game you always get a bunch of comments at the end from every man and his dog, and you have to be extremely careful at analysing which ones will actually make the game better. But Nintendo were extremely focused at coming up with relevant comments.
NB: I'd never forget that one with *Star Fox Adventures*. We'd gone to E3 with *Dinosaur Planet* and it was kind of obvious anyway, thinking about it after the fact, but the first thing [Miyamoto] said to us was, 'Why isn't that *Star Fox?*' It made perfect sense really.
RG: Were there ever any disagreements between you that you can remember?
GM: They never enforced a single decision; they just had a habit of making it sound better than your idea. They'd suggest something and we'd be savvy enough to pick up on the ones they wanted and disregard the ones that we thought maybe they didn't think so strongly about. They were very subtle about that, especially Miyamoto. He'd kind of suggest something then leave it at that, and then, when you presented a version with it in next time, he'd act all surprised.
GA: Or if you didn't put it in, the next time he'd suggest it again.
GM: It was a very good way, but I don't think they ever said, 'You must do this, you must do that.'
BG: I remember Miyamoto sending lots of sketches for Donkey Kong when we were doing *Donkey Kong Country*. He had very definite thoughts about the way Donkey Kong himself should look, and Tim had obviously designed and rendered all of these images of Donkey Kong. Miyamoto had very distinct ideas about little aspects of it. They got incorporated, but leaving Rare to leave a little stamp on the character.
GM: He was admirably hands-off, actually. If that would have been my character, I would have been looking into it every day. I mean literally he handed one of his characters over to us and we changed the look of it completely.

RG: Why were some of your games published by Nintendo and others, such as *Diddy Kong Racing* and *Conker's Bad Fur Day*, published by yourselves?
GM: There were plans for Rare to become more of a publisher, backed by Nintendo. We were still doing games exclusively for Nintendo, but we were to bear more of the costs of developing them, but then, obviously as a publisher, we would make more out of it. I mean, to the average employee



Having begun life as a Nintendo game, Grabbed By The Ghoulies went on to be the first Rare game to be published by Microsoft.



RARE *THROUGH THE YEARS*



1994

Donkey Kong Country
Format: SNES
With its stunning visuals and flawless level design, this important title helped the SNES fight for its life against the fifth generation consoles. It also demonstrated how strong Rare and Nintendo's relationship had become over the years, given that Nintendo would entrust the studio with one of its oldest IPs.



1995

Killer Instinct
Format: SNES
Originally released in arcades in 1994, where it gained much popularity, Rare quickly set to work on porting *Killer Instinct* to the Super Nintendo. As you would expect, cutbacks had to be made in terms of the visuals, like the scaling and zooming effects, but Rare still managed to turn out a fantastic home port nonetheless.

RARE *TIMELINE*



Battletoads
Year Released: 1991
System: NES

Battletoads
Year Released: 1991
System: Game Boy

Beetlejuice
Year Released: 1991
System: NES



Digger T Rock
Year Released: 1991
System: NES

High Speed
Year Released: 1991
System: NES

Pirates!
Year Released: 1991
System: NES

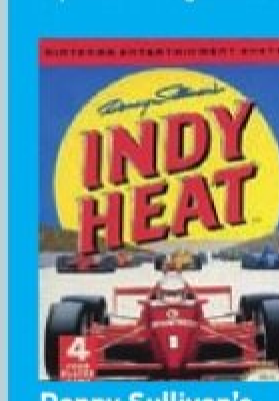
Sneaky Snakes
Year Released: 1991
System: Game Boy

Super RC Pro-Am
Year Released: 1991
System: Game Boy

WWF Superstars
Year Released: 1991
System: Game Boy

Beetlejuice
Year Released: 1992
System: Game Boy

Championship Pro-Am
Year Released: 1992
System: Mega Drive



Danny Sullivan's Indy Heat
Year Released: 1992
System: NES

RC Pro-Am II
Year Released: 1992
System: NES

Wizards & Warriors Kuros: Visions Of Power
Year Released: 1992
System: NES

A RARE GLIMPSE

RARE THROUGH THE YEARS



1996

Ken Griffey Jr's Winning Run

Format: SNES

Never reaching our shores, *Ken Griffey* was, until *Kinect Sports*, the last sports game Rare had produced. The game featured 28 Major League teams, various game modes to delight baseball fans, and staggeringly realistic visuals too. In fact, we're not even fans of the sport and we still found it good fun.



1997

GoldenEye 007

Format: N64

After doing great things with *Donkey Kong*, Rare then set its sights on *James Bond*. It delivered not only a thoroughly good *Bond* videogame but proved that the elaborate nature of first-person shooters could work on consoles. A true milestone in console gaming, the impact of *GoldenEye 007* is still felt today.

it made no difference whatsoever, but behind the scenes we had more involvement than we would normally have had.

RG: Do you have any amusing anecdotes about Nintendo that you could share with us?

GM: I have loads, but only a few of them are probably printable. [laughs]

GA: I remember the look on Miyamoto's face when we showed him *Donkey Kong 64* for the first time. It was all as he would expect it to be: swinging on ropes, collecting bananas, jumping into barrels, and we were displaying it on this massive screen downstairs in the old motion capture area. Anyway, everything was fine, it was exactly as he expected, and then Donkey Kong pulled out a gun. But it wasn't as it turned out to be, which was a coconut gun – it was a real gun with a metal barrel, and Miyamoto's face just kind of dropped. You could tell what was going on in his head. He then had one of his little suggestions for us later on, which was could we turn it into an organic gun.

NB: I want to hear about Diddy Kong being dressed up in that rubber suit, with squeaky noises.

GA: I think Brendan was having some fun one day.

BG: It wasn't me; I think it was Mr [Mark] Stephenson. For some reason it was a complete shiny red PVC suit, except for a little brown hole under the tail. [laughs]

GA: We didn't show Miyamoto that.

NB: Good job.

RG: Speaking of *DKC*, how do you feel about Retro Studios continuing the series with *Donkey Kong Country Returns*, and have you had the opportunity to play the game yet?

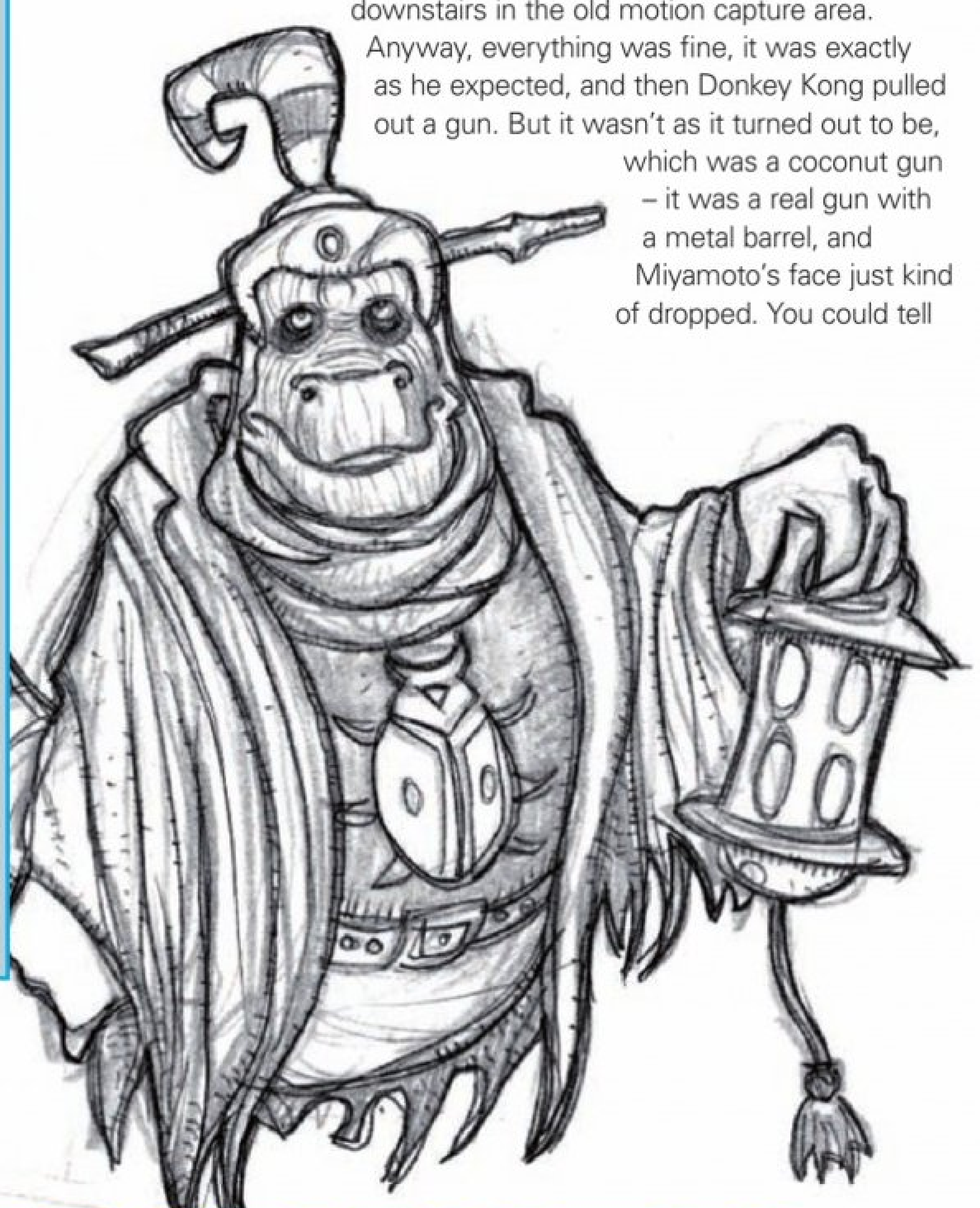
GA: Yeah, I had a go on it at E3 myself and thought they'd done a pretty good job on it, actually. It's looking good.

BG: I'm just waiting to see if they've got as many layers of parallax as I put into the game. You'd always get Tim coming back saying, 'I'm sure you can get a few more layers in there', and 'Can we have 27 different layers of rain?' as it was coming in from the background and gradually getting closer.

RG: So what was that period like at Rare when your relationship with Nintendo ended?

GM: A lot of the time when you were working on the games you weren't privy to what was going on in the boardroom, so I guess a lot of people were quite surprised that we weren't with Nintendo any more. I think it came down to some clause that had to be exercised within a certain amount of time. I think they had to buy the remaining shares in the company or literally say no. So they were kind of put on the spot at a certain time, decided not to, and that was literally where it ended. There was no gradual breakdown of relationships or anything like that.

GA: We were working on several titles for the GameCube at the time and we obviously showcased some of these titles the first time the GameCube was shown to the public at E3. A lot of those games then migrated over to the Xbox. From a developer's perspective, it was just business as usual: you were working on games, making products and still working on the GameCube, even though we heard that the relationship could be coming to an end.



Star Fox Adventures was Rare's final game for a Nintendo home console.

THE RARE NECESSITIES The games we'd like to see remade

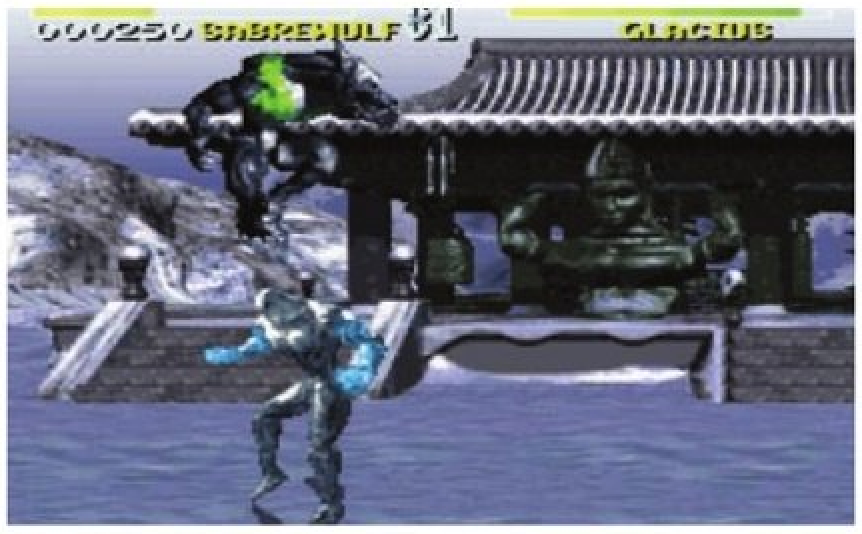


Blast Corps

■ A great and underrated N64 gem, *Blast Corps* was a genius idea: the player must use a wide array of demolition vehicles, including two giant mechanised robot suits, to clear a safe route for a computerised truck carrying two unstable nuclear warheads to a safe zone. A great 3D update of nail-biting reaction games like *Loco-Motion*. We're desperate to see a sequel.

Killer Instinct

■ Given the resurgence of the fighting genre of late, there's no better time to see Jago, Sabrewulf, TJ and co return to our telly screens for some epic new dust-ups. Typical of Rare, the game was piled with characters, options and moves. So just think: customisable Ultra Combos, gruesome finishing moves, and glorious HD visuals. The possibilities are awesome.





Snake Rattle N Roll

■ During our visit to Rare, we were told that the guys had got a version of *Marble Madness* working on Kinect, in which you control the ball using your hips. While *Marble Madness* controls differently to *SRNR*, there's nothing stopping Rare applying a similar control system to the game. It would most likely be impossibly hard, but we wouldn't care.



This is where Rare's artists and software engineers can be found. Designed to resemble a barn, this was requested by the Stampers, who wanted Rare's second home to feel in keeping with the original farmhouse in which the studio was based.

RG: What was the mood like at Rare when it was formally announced that it would be parting ways with Nintendo?
GA: We just carried on, business as usual. There were obviously discussions going on in the backrooms between Rare and a handful of interested parties in terms of being owned by these companies, and until we knew exactly what was going to happen we just carried on. I mean, for all we knew we could have been acquired by a multiformat company and could have just carried on working on the GameCube software, so it didn't really affect development in any way, shape or form.

BG: There's certainly nothing new about working on a game that isn't going to come to completion. We've all worked on games that have got canned for various different reasons.
NB: It happens all the time. Generally whatever you were working on – as if you'd transferred over to another team – gets carried across with you and starts to appear in another project in some form. Certainly, from a programming point of view, a lot of the code is transferable.
GA: And from a creative point of view, it's really cool because you're constantly learning all the time in the job anyway, and you can constantly learn new things and new techniques, so you're still on the cusp of everything regardless of what format you're on. I think that's probably the speciality of the company over the years. I think Rare has really specialised in being able to turn its hand to new hardware and technology. It's also been a signature of the company, as well as the games.

RG: In the past, Rare has been seen to have an air of secrecy surrounding it. Do you think this has always worked in its favour, and how has that changed over the last ten years?
GA: That is almost the legacy of what people remember the company as. The last five years or so I don't think we've been as secretive. We've done a lot more press things and turned up at shows and talked to the public. But back in the day I don't think Chris and Tim enjoyed being in the limelight. They just wanted to make the games, and let them talk for themselves.
GM: Any time spent not making the games is obviously time wasted. But even away from work they were incredibly private people and so I think the company just reflected them as individuals. It had its good points and bad points. It's quite nice being secretive but then, on the other hand, you want to tell people sometimes what you are doing and how you did it.
NB: We can still be very secretive when we need to be. I mean a good example would be Kinect. We've been working on it for two years but nobody knew we were until about Christmas last year. Even some parts of the studio didn't know what we were doing, as we had to be so secretive about it, because with a hardware launch like that you've got to keep things close to your chest. But with the games, and the products, you can't really do that nowadays.
GM: I do think some degree of secrecy is a good thing because a product can get so overexposed that you know every single thing about that product before it comes out. Then, when you play it, it's exactly like what you expected. I still personally like to find a game that you haven't heard about, you play it and you're like, 'Wow! Where did that come from?'
NB: But there's that nice balance you get where you don't talk about certain bits of a game and let players find it themselves.
GM: I think we're going to get that with *Kinect Sports*. We have talked about it quite a lot; I just wonder if people believe what we're saying. I think when people actually play it they'll be extremely surprised and hopefully delighted.

Anticipation

■ Not one of Rare's most well-known titles, but we think this early NES game, which is basically a virtual board game of connect the dots meets *Pictionary*, could work brilliantly on Kinect. Just imagine drawing objects in thin air, and then seeing them get filled with colour and detail in front of your eyes. It all sounds like perfect motion-controlled party fodder to us.





RARE THROUGH THE YEARS



1998

Banjo-Kazooie

Format: N64

Starting life as *Project Dream* on the SNES before finding a home on the N64, *Banjo-Kazooie* became one of the studio's most successful N64 games. Then again, taking the open-ended, gradually unfurling platform gameplay of *Mario 64*, and imparting it with the visual style and animal themes of *DKC*, was always going to be a perfect recipe for a mega hit on the N64.

RARE TIMELINE

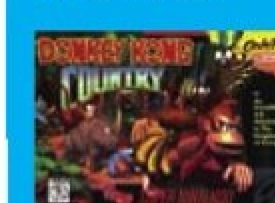
Battletoads & Double Dragon: The Ultimate Team
Year Released: 1993
System: NES, Mega Drive, SNES, Game Boy

Battletoads In Battlemaniacs
Year Released: 1993
System: SNES

Battletoads In Ragnarok's World
Year Released: 1993
System: Game Boy

X The Ball
Year Released: 1993
System: Arcade

Battletoads
Year Released: 1994
System: Arcade



Donkey Kong Country
Year Released: 1994
System: SNES

Killer Instinct
Year Released: 1994
System: Arcade

Monster Max
Year Released: 1994
System: Game Boy

Donkey Kong Country 2: Diddy's Kong Quest
Year Released: 1995
System: SNES

Donkey Kong Land
Year Released: 1995
System: Game Boy

Killer Instinct
Year Released: 1995
System: SNES



Donkey Kong Country 3: Dixie Kong's Double Trouble!
Year Released: 1996
System: SNES

Donkey Kong Land 2
Year Released: 1996
System: Game Boy

Ken Griffey Jr's Winning Run
Year Released: 1996
System: SNES

Killer Instinct 2
Year Released: 1996
System: Arcade

RARE THROUGH THE YEARS

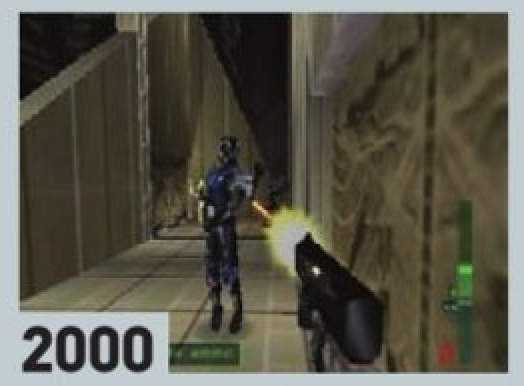


1999

Jet Force Gemini

Format: N64

Why *Jet Force Gemini* didn't receive the same kind of adulation as *GoldenEye 007* or *Banjo-Kazooie* on its release is a bit of a mystery, as it's a brilliant third-person shooter that blends together elements of both games. Carrying all those classic Rare hallmarks on its sleeve, it's a massive, diverse and slick adventure, and one of the studio's most under-appreciated gems.



2000

Perfect Dark

Format: N64

A sequel to *GoldenEye 007* was a given, but with no *Bond* licence Rare was forced to come up with its own super spy. The result was Joanna Dark – half Pierce Brosnan, half Lara Croft. In many ways, *Perfect Dark* was the better game, its futuristic setting allowing Rare to use its creativity to the fullest and come up with a great sci-fi story and even better gadgetry and weapons.

Detailed and expansive hub worlds to explore outside the levels themselves are a familiar hallmark of Rare's adventure games.





This mural was a gift by Nintendo president Hiroshi Yamauchi. The rainbow colouration pixelates the landscape and features various pieces of videogame iconography, such as Space Invaders.

GA: I think that's the great thing about that particular product. People have an expectation because of previous motion-controlled games, and so it's almost one of those you can pass over as I've seen that before. But the amount of feedback we've had coming back from that game has been phenomenal.

RG: You mentioned an unfinished *Battletoads* game earlier. Can you tell us more about some of your cancelled games and your migrated GameCube projects?

GA: Well I guess the obvious candidates would be *Kameo*, *Grabbed By The Ghoulies*, and *Star Fox Adventures*. They obviously [migrated to the] GameCube but were started on the N64.

GM: Didn't *Perfect Dark* start on the GameCube?

NB: Yeah, *Perfect Dark Zero* was one as well.

RG: How big a job is it converting a started project to a new platform?

GA: So if we take *Kameo* as an example, we were working on the GameCube and then, after we were going to be acquired by Microsoft, we had to convert everything over from the GameCube to the Xbox, which took one, possibly two, engineers somewhere in the region of two weeks to do. Within a couple of weeks we had managed to get the game ported over as it was, but obviously you're then on a slightly different format, and a different market in many ways, so we had to kind of adjust some of the design of the game. *Kameo*'s probably got a longer tale in terms of its history because we had probably got about 70 to 80 per cent through finishing that game on the Xbox, and then the Xbox 360 was flagged up as something coming out very soon and we were asked would we consider delaying another year just to get it out on the 360. But it gave us an opportunity, I guess, to kind of push the content further and evolve the idea a little bit more. We had more time to work on certain aspects of the game, so it was probably the best thing to do in the long run.

GM: *Ghoulies* was a less rocky road. We did a bit of work on a GameCube version and then over to the Xbox, and then literally I think we put our foot down. The company was keen to get something out on the Xbox and say, 'Here you go. This is what we can do.'

GA: There was almost a bit of pressure. We'd just been acquired by Microsoft; we wanted to produce something as quickly as we could and have a game that probably wouldn't be developed by other developers. And so we probably could have done with a little bit more development time.

NB: Actually, this is a question from me: was *Ghoulies* inspired by *Atic Atac* on the Spectrum?

GM: No, *Ghoulies* is a weird one. It was the name that came first. We thought, 'Wouldn't that be a great name for a game?', and then later that we could create a very cool Rare-themed horror-style haunted house game. We had that title floating around and thought, 'Let's put the two together.'

BG: I'm not sure if I can mention this, but I was also doing *Killer Instinct 2* for the SNES. Some of the guys who were working on that walked out of the project, so I was roped in to finish it off in a hurry. Obviously I was unfamiliar with the code, but got that done as we were contracted to get it finished, but it was never published.

RG: So what happened?

BG: I actually have no idea. I know Nintendo obviously required it,





we handed it over to them, and I heard nothing more. I was trying to get hold of a copy for myself.

GA: It's not the first time it's happened in the company, though. It's not uncommon. For whatever reasons, be it publishing deals or backroom discussions, certain games may not see the light of day even though they are finished products.

NB: We'll have it in digital form somewhere, no doubt.

GA: It may have been something to do with *Killer Instinct Gold*, which was coming out on the N64 and to be released shortly after. From Nintendo's perspective, it may have been that they thought, 'We've got this new game, so we're going to try to promote this new platform and maybe those fans would follow *Killer Instinct* onto the N64.'

RG: Do you think switching a project between platforms can have a damaging effect?

GA: It depends how long that process is. If it's three or four years then you're still in the realms of being relevant – that's the important thing. A good concept is always a good concept; it's just the execution of that concept and how well that's done. If you can do that in a relatively good timeframe, I don't think it would hurt the process. In fact, in some ways it will probably aid the process.

NB: I think a good example of that was *Kameo*. There were things you [George] wanted to do on the GameCube that we couldn't, and we thought we might be able to on the Xbox, and then the 360 came along and we could definitely do it. So even though it had steered an unusual path, you ended up with something of greater spectacle than when it was first envisaged.



The Rare team at Manor Farmhouse, circa 1987: (L–R) Tim Stamper, Carole Stamper, Chris Stamper, Rachel Edwards, David Wise, Mark Betteridge, Paul Byford, Steven Stamper and Kevin Bayliss.

RG: Can you ever see the studio returning to the first-person shooter and racing genres? Or maybe even some of your early classic franchises?

GM: There are only so many genres in games, and the whole industry goes in cycles anyway. It used to be that platform games were king and you'd never see a day where it





Joanna Dark, Banjo and Conker can be seen here, patiently waiting in line to use the toilet. Is it weird that we were reminded of the loo stage in PaRappa The Rapper?

RARE THROUGH THE YEARS



2001

Conker's Bad Fur Day

Format: N64

Conker's Bad Fur Day could be seen as an archetypical Rare game on first impression, given the cuteness of its colourful nut-swallowing hero and likeness to the *Banjo-Kazooie* universe. But that soon changes once you play the game and discover that it's loaded with lewd humour.



2002

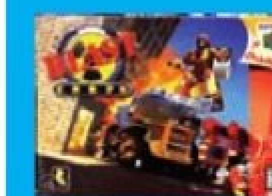
Star Fox Adventures

Format: GameCube

Originally an N64 project titled *Dinosaur Planet*, it eventually migrated to the GameCube and got a foxy re-skin after Miyamoto saw the game running and remarked on its strong similarities with *Star Fox*. Diluting the series' space combat with adventure akin to *Ocarina Of Time*, *Star Fox Adventures* was a departure from previous instalments.

RARE TIMELINE

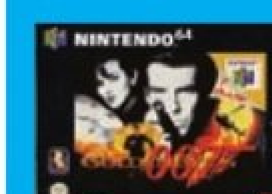
Killer Instinct Gold
Year Released: 1996
System: N64



Blast Corps
Year Released: 1997
System: N64

Diddy Kong Racing
Year Released: 1997
System: N64

Donkey Kong Land III
Year Released: 1997
System: Game Boy, Game Boy Color



GoldenEye 007
Year Released: 1997
System: N64

Banjo-Kazooie
Year Released: 1998
System: N64

Conker's Pocket Tales
Year Released: 1999
System: Game Boy Color



Jet Force Gemini
Year Released: 1999
System: N64

Donkey Kong 64
Year Released: 1999
System: N64

Mickey's Racing Adventure
Year Released: 1999
System: Game Boy Color

Banjo-Tooie
Year Released: 2000
System: N64

Donkey Kong Country
Year Released: 2000
System: Game Boy Color

Mickey's Speedway USA
Year Released: 2000
System: N64



Perfect Dark
Year Released: 2000
System: N64

AT THE MOVIES

Everyone remembers GoldenEye, but what about these?



Who Framed Roger Rabbit

■ When given one of the biggest cinema licences of the Eighties, Rare was brave enough to do something a bit different with it. The result was a cartoon/adventure game, with players assuming the role of Eddie Valiant from the movie, running and punching around Hollywood and conversing with characters to solve the murder case pinned on the wisecracking bunny.



A Nightmare On Elm Street

■ A movie about a child-killing janitor who gets burnt into a melted-faced anti-sandman with knife gloves isn't typical subject matter for a NES game. But Rare did the best it could to make it work, delivering a decent game in the process. Half beat-'em-up, half horror-themed platformer, it bears little resemblance to the plot of the films but featured Freddie and a day/night mechanic.

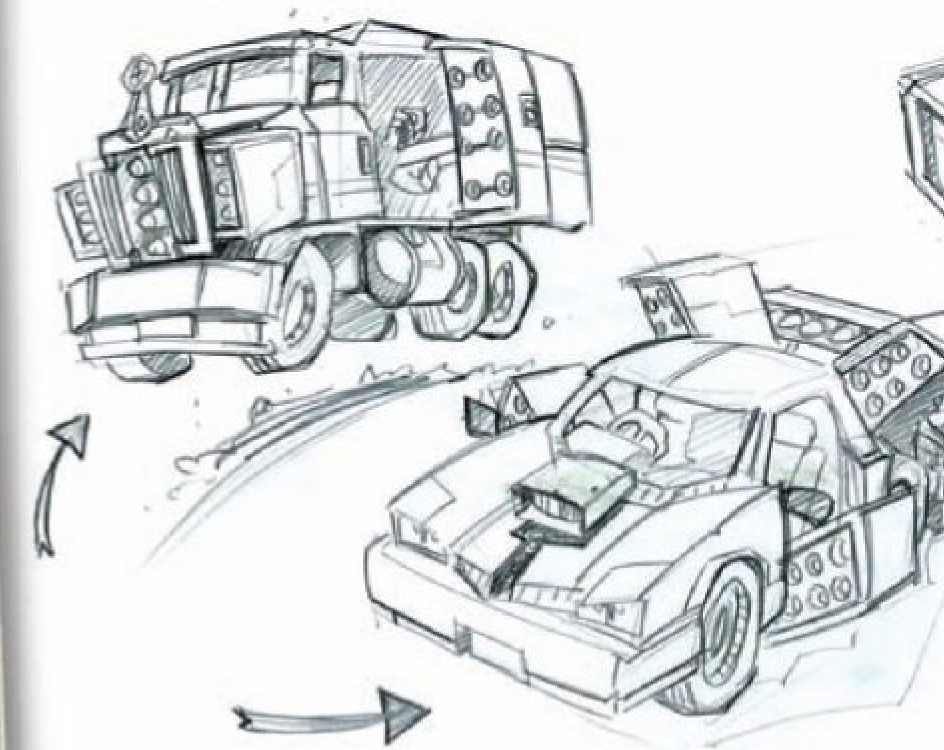


Beetlejuice

■ This bizarre platformer isn't Rare's best work, although it's nicely presented and features some excellent music by David Wise. Unfair level design and infuriating controls working against a skittish hero with no standard method of attack will have you looking like the game's bedraggled antihero before long. Beetlejuice essentially has to use money earned by squishing bugs to buy attacks.



This is the original game-testing room before the operation was moved to the studio's new site in Fazeley. A small amount of testing is still done here, but the relocation process has clearly taken place



wouldn't be that, and then FPSs came along.

NB: Think about it in another way: literally, two years ago, about this week, we were just about to go to Seattle to see Project Natal, as it was then. If I was supposed to be one of these people who predict these kinds of trends, and you'd said to me to say that we'd be here, that *Kinect Sports* would be in manufacture now and about to hit the shelves two years from that date, I wouldn't have second-guessed it at all.

GM: I mean, we haven't done a sports title since *Ken Griffey Jr's Winning Run* on the Super Nintendo, and that was a baseball game, of all things – a sport we knew nothing about.

GA: The other great thing about Kinect is that it could almost reinvigorate a lot of old concepts or old ideas, whether you're talking about fighting games or shooting games. For us, Kinect opens a way of potentially creating games like that that could appeal to more people than just those that would generally want to sit on the couch with the joypad. In answer to the original question about some of those games coming back at some point, there's potential; there are always possibilities. It's just whether we can come up with a decent concept and execute it well enough.

BG: I've always wanted to do a racing game. I got to spend two weeks working on a prototype racing game for the Xbox. It was codenamed *Banjo-Kazoomie*, and it was a kind of kart racer, but you constructed the karts out of different parts, so I guess it was kind of a precursor to *Nuts & Bolts*. But for those two weeks I was doing the driving mechanics for it.

GM: We had a coin-up for a while, didn't we? Mark [Betteridge] was working on a racing game. Can you remember? It was a long time ago now. The working name was *Balls-Out*, as in flat-out. [everybody laughs]

GM: They were definitely doing this prototype for an arcade racing game. And it was on our own custom arcade hardware, and I think that was the last game we ever tried on arcade. I think the arcades were dying a death at that point, so we switched focus purely to the console stuff again.

RG: So tell us about your relationship with Microsoft. How does it compare to Nintendo?

GA: I think initially, when we started working with Microsoft, it was very much a case of hands-off, letting us do our own thing, and we did, I guess. But we were kind of aimed at a very different demographic, but our priority as a first-party developer, and one of the reasons why they acquired the studio, was to try to create games that other companies wouldn't be looking at creating. So we were looking at trying to broaden the demographic on the Xbox 360. And we did our thing, which is what we've always done in the past. I think over the last three years I'd say they've probably become a little bit more involved.

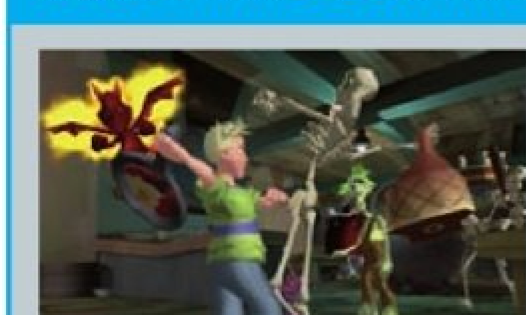
NB: But that's as the business has changed and we've got more involved with them. We've certainly never been as involved in a platform, and that has brought us together in that way, but also I think all developers have to be much more mindful now of the kind of market their games are going into.

GA: We are a lot more communicative with Microsoft than we were with Nintendo. But I think that might be more a reflection of where the industry is today, not necessarily our relationship with Microsoft.

NB: I think you would have seen this across all of Microsoft game studios over the last few years. A growth in the relationships between all of us, as well as the mothership, if you want to call it that. We work on stuff with Lionhead Studios, with Good Science, Big Park; I wouldn't say it makes life easier, but certainly when you're doing something like a hardware launch you want to be able to be on the phone five minutes after you've figured out how to do something, telling your compatriots how to do it as well.

GA: They have amazing resources at Microsoft as well. We tap into as much of that as we need to, and *Kinect*

RARE THROUGH THE YEARS



2003

Grabbed By The Ghoulies

Format: Xbox

Another of Rare's migrated GameCube titles, *Grabbed By The Ghoulies* was the studio's attempt to make a haunted house game, in the form of a more simplified and accessible platform game than its previous platform offerings. The studio's first release for the Xbox following its acquisition by Microsoft, it remains one of the machine's best-looking games.

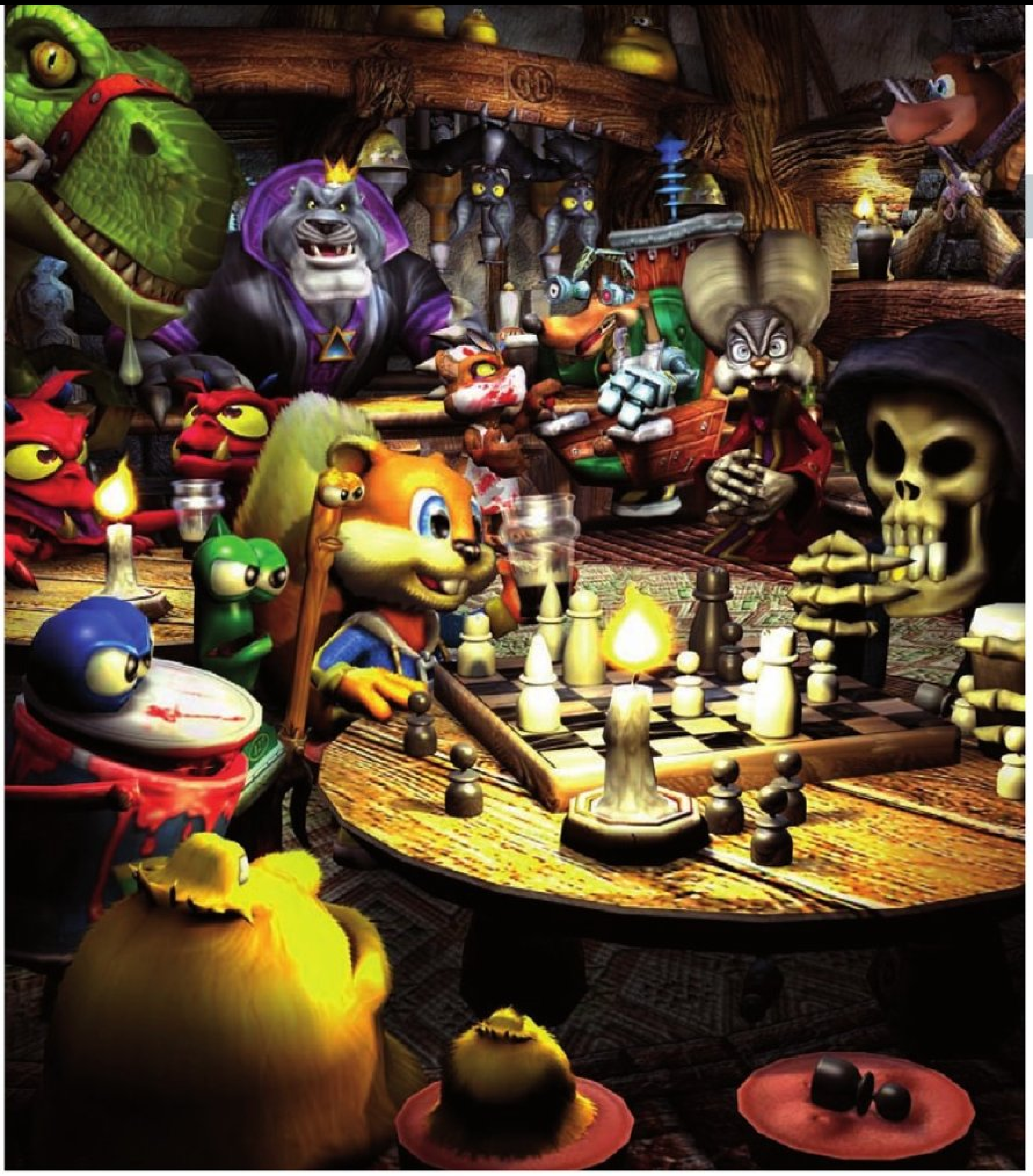


2004

Sabre Wulf

Format: GBA

Marking the end of a long 20-year hiatus for Sabreman, Rare dusted off the pith-helmeted hero for a colourful side-scrolling platform romp for the GBA. Infused with gameplay elements like riding animal steeds, and aesthetics seemingly taken from the same book as the *Donkey Kong Country* games, it's another of Rare's underrated games.





Sports is a good example of that. I think if you took all the games we've made in the past 15 years and added up the amount of user research we did, I think *Sports* would be ten times that total.

NB: And that's something where we literally go off to that team, explain why we need it, and they make it happen. We have to be very involved to make it happen. But yeah, *Kinect Sports* wouldn't be what it is without that.

GA: Generally what we do as well, and *Sports* was a good example, is we came up with three or four different examples for Kinect at the time, and then Microsoft picked which one they thought would then fit into their bigger strategy, what gaps they had in their portfolio, and together we made the decision really.



NB: But on the flip side of that, *Sports* is ours. What *Sports* looks like is down to us, but the fact that it is *Sports*, to a large extent is down to Microsoft. We're just closer. We wouldn't have any problem being on the phone to different groups every day if we needed to, whereas with Nintendo we probably wouldn't have done that. I mean, it's difficult for me to say because I was a rank-and-file programmer back in those days. I was head down just writing AI routines, but it certainly feels like we've got a closer relationship.

BG: In the earlier NES days of Rare we'd rarely share anything within the company. Everyone would write their own stuff for doing sprites, for doing scrolling in the background. The only bit of shared software I ever used was a music player, which was used by the whole company. So there's probably more sharing outside of Rare, with other studios, than there ever used to be within. So it's a different way we work now.

RG: What do you see as the key advantages and disadvantages to being a first-party developer?

GM: The obvious advantage is focus. It allows you to focus all your efforts on one hardware platform, get to know it as closely as possible, and therefore get the best out of it. It's like learning any new skill. If you learn three skills you can only devote a certain amount of time to each; if you're only learning one then you can put all of your time into it.

GA: There was talk before as well that when the Microsoft deal was going through there were a few other interested parties, which I'm not sure is properly documented anywhere. But there was an opportunity there to almost go multiformat. But that didn't necessarily mean that we would have to do all the code

RARE THROUGH THE YEARS



2005

Kameo: Elements Of Power

Format: 360

Kameo was an epic action adventure game that was four years in the making. Migrating between the GameCube, Xbox and finally the Xbox 360, it was one of the longest development processes for a game at Rare. It's notable for its staggering visuals and a shape-shifting heroine, Kameo, who could morph into plants, elemental warriors and animals.



2006

Viva Piñata

Format: 360

Rare's enchanting take on the life simulator genre saw players take a plot of land and culminate a glorious garden to attract, breed and nurture a wide variety of piñatas. The game since spawned a sequel, a party game spin-off and a great mini adaptation for the DS. Oh, and lest we forget an animated television series that we've never watched.



This unused character concept for Diddy Kong Racing would look at home in a certain Rare Xbox 360 game.

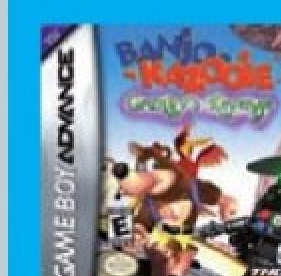
RARE TIMELINE

Perfect Dark
Year Released: 2000
System: Game Boy Color

Conker's Bad Fur Day
Year Released: 2001
System: N64

Mickey's Speedway USA
Year Released: 2001
System: Game Boy Color

Star Fox Adventures
Year Released: 2002
System: GameCube



Banjo-Kazooie: Grunty's Revenge
Year Released: 2003
System: Game Boy Advance

Donkey Kong Country
Year Released: 2003
System: Game Boy Advance

Grabbed By The Ghoulies
Year Released: 2003
System: Xbox

Donkey Kong Country 2
Year Released: 2004
System: Game Boy Advance



It's Mr Pants
Year Released: 2004
System: Game Boy Advance

Sabre Wulf
Year Released: 2004
System: Game Boy Advance

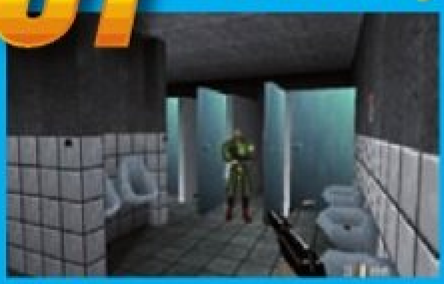
Banjo-Pilot
Year Released: 2005
System: Game Boy Advance



Conker: Live & Reloaded
Year Released: 2005
System: Xbox

READERS' TOP 25

01 GoldenEye 007



Well this didn't come as any surprise, but when you consider the impact it had on the genre, it really deserves to be here.

02 Banjo-Kazooie

03 Blast Corps

04 Donkey Kong Country

05 Perfect Dark

06 Conker's Bad Fur Day



To think that this was going to be another cutesy platformer until Rare gave it a massive revamp and introduced us to swearing animals and warring teddies.

07 Diddy Kong Racing

08 Viva Piñata

09 Donkey Kong Country 2

10 Battletoads

11 Jet Force Gemini



Another underrated gem that we're glad to see get a high placing. The collecting elements annoy, but the hectic action and enormous bosses make for a fantastic gaming experience.

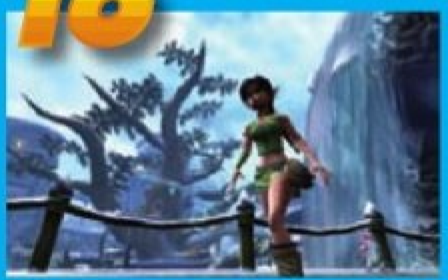
12 Star Fox Adventures

13 Banjo-Kazooie: Nuts & Bolts

14 Killer Instinct

15 Jetpac Refuelled

16 Kameo: Elements Of Power



With a gestation period that spanned four consoles, *Kameo* is one of the most underrated of Rare's 360 games. It's a wonderful adventure that deserves to be played by everybody.

17 Perfect Dark Zero

18 Banjo-Tooie

19 Grabbed By The Ghoulies

20 Solar Jetman

21 Sabre Wulf



Another homage to the Ultimate days. It's a world away from the Spectrum original, but its inventive gameplay and nods to past Ultimate games make this a firm favourite.

22 RC Pro-Am

23 Snake Rattle N Roll

24 Banjo-Kazooie: Grunty's Revenge

25 Marble Madness

It's not every day that a company gets to celebrate 25 years in the industry. With that milestone in mind, we asked **Retro Gamer** readers to name their favourite Rare titles, and while the number one spot was always going to be fairly obvious, there are still plenty of surprises to be found.



Shadowman on Banjo-Kazooie: Nuts & Bolts

Out of all of the *Banjo* games I'd probably pick this one as my favourite. While I was initially gutted at the fact that the focus was toward vehicle gameplay and not huge, expansive levels, that attitude all changed once I put some serious time into the game. Some of the challenges are simply amazing, leaving it entirely up to you how you wish to tackle them, and therein is what makes the game so fun.



Crunchy on Kameo

You know what? It's not crap. Everybody says it's crap. It isn't crap. It's actually very good. Especially the score attack mode.



harlequ1n on Diddy Kong Racing

Hands down my favourite multiplayer racing game of all time. Driving not only cars, but also aeroplanes and hovercraft, as well as featuring a fun adventure mode, made it, in my opinion, way better than the over-hyped *Mario Kart 64*.



C=Style on GoldenEye 007

What else can be said about this complete and utter masterpiece? To this day it's still the most fun I've had with an FPS, and I play it regularly. So many innovations were brought to the table with this game, which spawned a million wannabes and helped first-person shooters take off on consoles. Fantastic multiplayer too.



ToxieDogg on Donkey Kong Country 2

A marvellous 2D platformer with amazing graphics and music, and the best of the *Donkey Kong Country* trilogy, with just the right amount of difficulty and secret stuff.



Mire Mare on Conker's Bad Fur Day

When fluffy and nice got all coarse and full of sexual innuendo and toilet humour! I loved it! A brilliant mix of humour, story and action with some brilliant film parodies thrown in for good measure. The multiplayer 'Tediz vs Frenchies' was a lot of fun, and it's still hilarious that the Frenchies say 'hee-hor hee-hor' as they run around.



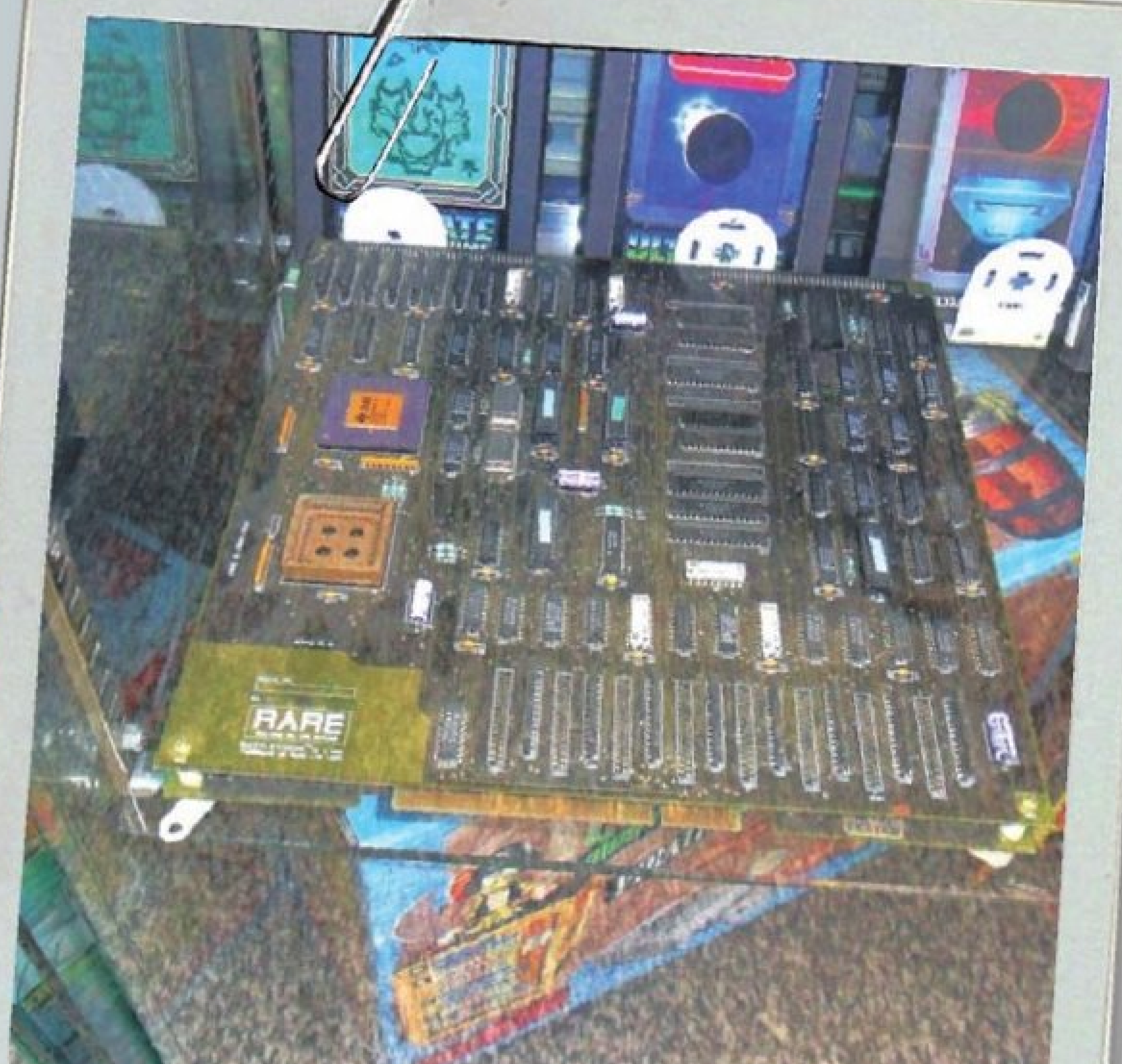
Giss on Banjo-Kazooie

This is my favorite 3D platformer of all time. Great controls, great characters, great levels and a great soundtrack. It's great.



Rare has won many awards for its services to the games industry over the past 25 years, including a number of BAFTAs. All are proudly showcased here.





Chris and Tim Stamper took their first steps in their careers by building arcade boards as Ashby Computers & Graphics. This link to arcades vanished with Ultimate but returned with Rare when the studio produced Killer Instinct and Super Battletoads.



for all the games on all the formats; we could make one product and someone else would have done the work.

NB: The thing, as well, with being tied to, let's not just say one publisher but one platform holder, is that you get a chance to implement and shape that platform as well. Certainly looking more to now, Avatars have fundamentally changed a lot of people's perceptions of the Xbox and the [New Xbox Experience], and they were developed here. If we weren't part of the platform holder, we wouldn't be able to do that.

BG: With Kinect obviously we had to be involved straight from the start, before any third-party publisher could get even a sniff of it. And it's been a fantastic experience to do something completely new.

NB: But also scary at the same time. You think back: there were the three of us flying back after we'd first seen it, going, 'How the hell are we going to make games with this? There's not even any buttons!' And then, two years down the line, it's all obvious now, and we've been feeding that information back into Microsoft and third-party developers as well. If you weren't part of the platform you couldn't do that.

RG: How much autonomy do you really have as a first-party developer?

GA: You've got a degree of autonomy but you have to understand that the industry has changed fundamentally from what it was ten years ago. Back then, we could have got together, come up with a whole bunch of concepts and just started working on those games. Then go to Nintendo six months down the line, show them a prototype of what we've put together and they'd say, 'Okay, great, we can do something with that.' Whereas now the cost of development is just so much higher than it was. The amount of people you have to get involved to develop anything is ridiculous to what it was like. Now you have 30 to 40 programmers working on one game. There's big money involved in the industry, and I think that when that happens, in any industry, you've got to start falling into line a little bit. These companies become risk-averse. They don't want to be investing too many millions on gambles, so the industry has changed quite fundamentally.

RG: How different is it to try to create new franchises today than, say, ten years ago?

GA: Again, it's different. To create a new franchise today from the ground up is very difficult. You're competing with all the established IPs and licensed products, so it's a very different world to be in. Ten years ago it would have been a little bit easier to throw a bear and a bird together and create something for Nintendo, and to do the same thing today is more difficult. Tastes have changed; the way people play games has changed. It's a very different space.

BG: It's down to sheer speed, I think. We used to be able to have six games on the go at once and be knocking out each game within a year. So, if you throw enough stuff out there, some of it's going to stick and you've got a chance of finding a really strong success.

RG: Can we expect to see a return from you to traditional controller-based games, or is Rare's focus now solely on Kinect?

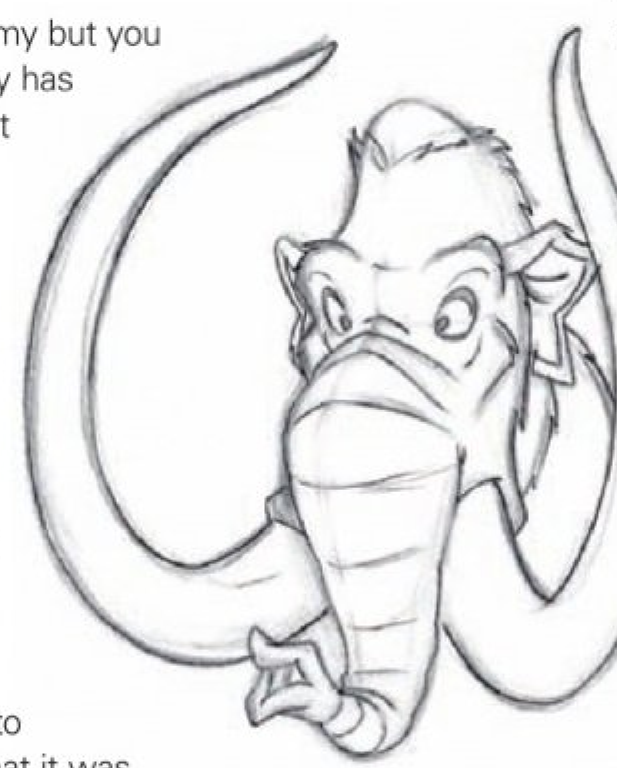
GA: For the foreseeable future Kinect is the road that we're on. That doesn't necessarily mean that is the road we're going to stay on, but that's where we're heading for the next year.

NB: I suppose really what we've found is there is so much cool stuff we could do, and we've kind of scratched the surface with *Kinect Sports* and it would be such a shame to leave it now.

GA: And it's highly dependent on how successful the launch is and how well the games do. There are good vibes that it's going to be good, so the future looks rosy, but we'll just have to wait and see.

RG: How has Microsoft changed Rare?

GA: I think they've definitely taught us to be more mindful of the market over the last handful of years. We always created games for ourselves a lot of the time. And that's great. You had a lot of passion behind those games. They were very unique, they were very unusual, they had a market at the time on the N64, and to some degree on the 360 as well, but I think making games nowadays is certainly about trying to look at a specific audience. The market has become so much bigger than what it used to be. You've got families playing games, you've got kids at eight years of age playing games, you've got pensioners playing games, so the market has become so much bigger, and it's taught us that we do need to be more specific when we target the audience that we're going to make a game for. But we still retain the essence of what Rare is all about. We love working on new technology, we love working on new things. I guess it's taught us to be more mindful of the market, more diligent in terms of production, and to try to get games finished to a better time scale, but hasn't kind of diminished our ability to be creative.



RG: Finally, what, in your opinion, defines a Rare game?

GA: There's definitely a sense of humour, definitely a sense of technical prowess. Visually, I think we've always been there or thereabouts.

GM: It's the attention to detail as well. You never really feel the job is done. You never quite feel like you've done enough so you keep chasing and chasing.

BG: I hate seeing my own games because all I see are the bits I didn't get round to finishing because I didn't have time.

NB: I can't play *Star Fox*! [laughs] It's cringing.

GM: Some people will never see some of the content in our games because it's not like you play through it once and see the whole lot. It's like a good film, where you'll watch it again and you'll notice different things. And that's the attention to detail where we've gone that extra mile on something. It's wanting to entertain people on that immediate level of 'this is fun to play', but then there's usually some hidden stuff as well. *

RARE THROUGH THE YEARS

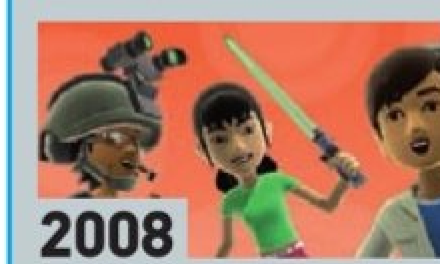


2007

Jetpac Refuelled

Format: 360

For its first XBLA release, Rare revisited the Stampers' first ever game. With over 100 levels, new high-definition graphics, online leaderboards, Achievements to unlock, and an on and offline co-op multiplayer mode, *Jetpac Refuelled* proved a great update of the original Spectrum classic.

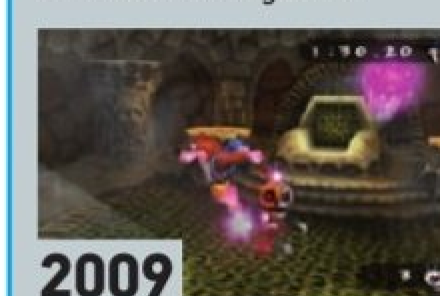


2008

Avatars

Format: 360

Instrumental in shaping the New Xbox Experience for Microsoft, Rare was responsible for Avatars, allowing users to create virtual versions of themselves in the Dashboard for use in certain games.

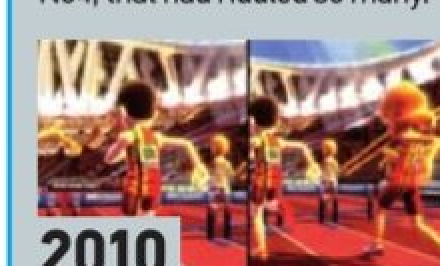


2009

Banjo-Tooie (XBLA)

Format: 360

Though officially released on the N64 in 2000, and this XBLA port was developed by 4J Studios, this was the only Rare release in 2009. Coming shortly after 4J's *Banjo-Kazooie* re-release, both updates were notable for finally making use of the 'Stop 'N' Swop' feature, dropped on the N64, that had riddled so many.



2010

Kinect Sports

Format: 360

Making use of Microsoft's new Kinect peripheral, *Kinect Sports* sees players controlling their Xbox Avatars with their entire body as they compete in a series of fun sporting games, comprising football, volleyball, ping pong, javelin and boxing, as well as various *Track & Field*-style running events.

RARE TIMELINE

Donkey Kong Country 3
Year Released: 2005
System: GBA

Kameo: Elements Of Power
Year Released: 2005
System: Xbox 360



Perfect Dark Zero
Year Released: 2005
System: Xbox 360

Viva Piñata
Year Released: 2006
System: Xbox 360

Diddy Kong Racing DS
Year Released: 2007
System: Nintendo DS

Jetpac Refuelled
Year Released: 2007
System: Xbox 360



Banjo-Kazooie: Nuts & Bolts
Year Released: 2008
System: Xbox 360

Viva Piñata: Pocket Paradise
Year Released: 2008
System: Nintendo DS



Viva Piñata: Trouble In Paradise
Year Released: 2008
System: Xbox 360

Kinect Sports
Year Released: 2010
System: Xbox 360

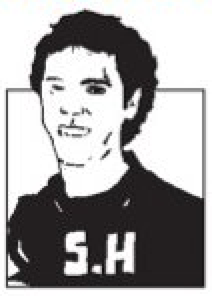




Daze Before Christmas

SANTA CLAUS THE MOODY

» RETROREVIVAL



» MEGA DRIVE
» SUNSOFT
» 1994

It's a brave developer who chooses to base a game around the theme of Christmas. Not trying to put a damper on Christmas, but the game will obviously need to be released in the run-up to the holiday for it to fully capitalise on the festive spirit, and this particular chimney is both narrow and crammed. Not only is Christmas a time that most developers release their big-hitters, but following all of the present unwrapping, tree dressing and present returning, most people are soon left wanting to forget the festivities the instant they return to the office.

One of the most famous, sought-after, and last examples of this now-dead game genre is *Daze Before Christmas*. Released only in Australia for some reason (I can only assume they like Christmas more than all the other countries) it has become pretty sought-after with collectors, as few copies of the game were released. Primarily a side-scrolling platform game, *Daze* focused on Santa's fictional plight to rescue all his elfin employees and reindeer from an evil band of tenuous Xmas-themed bosses. And, as way of a little stocking filler, between some stages the action switched to levels that saw Santa flying across various cities dropping packages down any working chimneys – where the presents would then presumably get burnt to a crisp.

So far, so Christmas, right? Well, the game gets a little more bizarre in parts, and this is mainly through the inclusion of Santa having weird Merlin-meets-Doctor-Jekyll powers. His main method of attack is a form of magic dust that turns his enemies into presents. Also, if his lips touch even a drop of coffee, which takes the form of power-ups in the game, he transforms in his demonic alter-ego: Anti-Claus. In this form, he is momentarily invincible and attacks by belting his enemies over the face with his sack of gifts.

Daze certainly isn't the greatest platformer, but it's better than it probably has any right to be. The levels are varied, the visuals colourful and the animation slick. Is it worth the tall asking price? That all depends on how much you like Christmas, I guess. *


038850
x5

CLASSIC GAMING ON A BUDGET

CHEAP AS CHIPS



If there's one thing we've learnt about retro gaming, it's that your money can stretch an amazingly long way if you want it to. Granted, a mint copy of *Radiant Silvergun* is going to cost you a small fortune, but there are plenty of other worthy titles that can be picked up for less than a fiver…

SEYMOUR GOES TO HOLLYWOOD

INFO

- **RELEASED:** 1991
- **SYSTEM:** SPECTRUM, AMSTRAD, COMMODORE
- **PUBLISHER:** CODEMASTERS
- **DEVELOPER:** BIG RED SOFTWARE
- **EXPECT TO PAY:** £1



» [Amstrad] Getting around the 96 screens was actually quite a mind-bending task at times.

During the 1980s and early 1990s, mag writers had a real love-hate relationship with Dizzy. There were some scribes who detested the character and many readers who were fed up of reading about it. So imagine how they felt when Codemasters introduced what was essentially a new shape for the infamous egg and unleashed Seymour into the world.

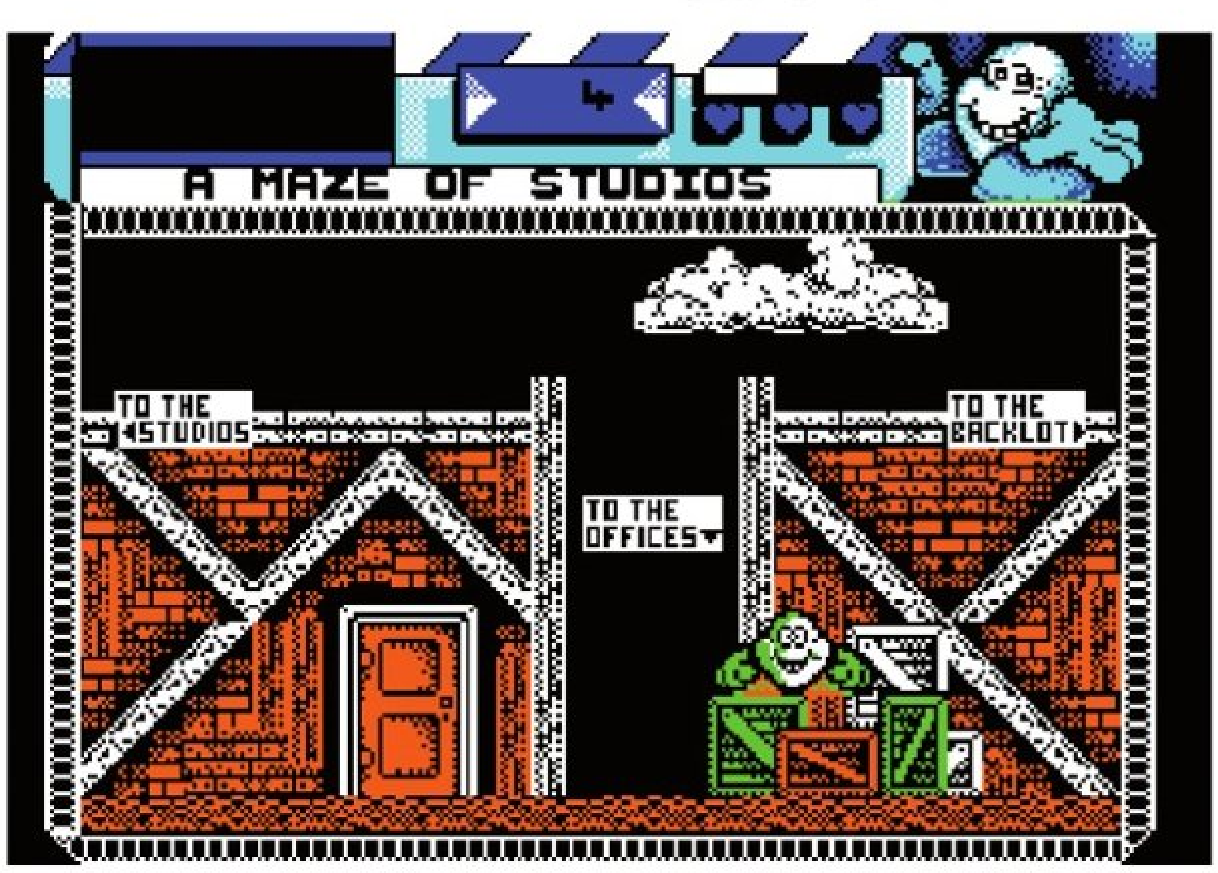
It was the guys at Big Red Software who created Seymour, a character who resembled a potato and yet inhabited a more realistic world than the fantasy creations by The Oliver Twins. Codemasters had toyed with the idea of placing Dizzy in real-life settings but it feared that would ruin the creation that had so helped it to achieve success.

In *Seymour Goes to Hollywood*, the new hero suddenly found that his stab at fame was being hindered by the fact the scripts were locked in a safe and the keys had gone missing. So with everyone else seemingly too lazy to go look for them and in the sheer absence of runners, it was up to Seymour himself to go and find them.

And while that may not actually sound the most gripping of plots, it did make for an entertaining game. It worked on the same level as *Dizzy* in that you wandered around a vast complex, talking to various people who would offer clues and help with puzzles. Big Red had worked on *Magicland Dizzy*, you see, and so it knew what made a good *Dizzy* game and that, in effect, was what *Seymour* was.



» [Amstrad] This limo does seem rather big for pint-sized Seymour.



One of the first puzzles you encountered was a busy road. Many players spent hours trying to get across only to realise that it was actually impossible to do and they had just wasted a humongous amount of time. The idea was to set off the other way – it proved massively frustrating and something that could so easily have killed the game for many people.

Those who figured it out, though, were richly rewarded with a 96-screen game that had plenty of little asides, quirks and even Tarzan. And that road 'red herring' aside, the game was packed with puzzles that would satisfy anyone who likes to engage their brain while playing.

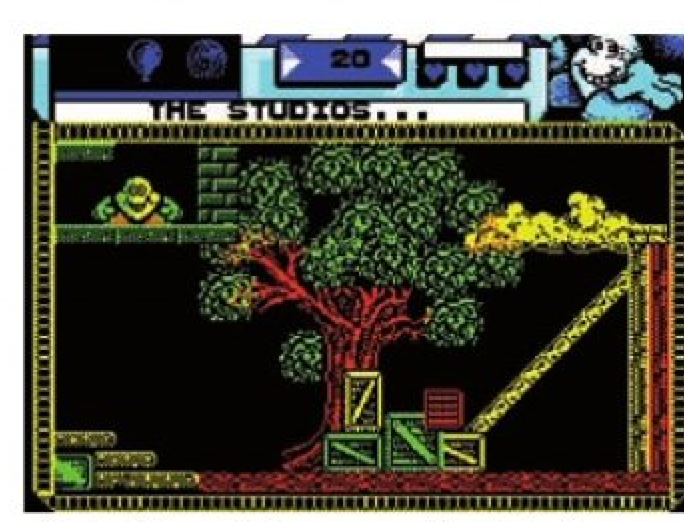
Despite the similarities between *Seymour* and *Dizzy*, it was sufficiently different to justify being a new series. The tendency for Dizzy to get himself into trouble was replaced with a character who was let down by others and had to sort out the issues someone else had created.

It's subtle, but it does tend to resonate with the real world a bit more. It also meant that the *Seymour* games could be more edgy, with the speech bubbles that appeared above the character's head being filled with wit, wisdom and a healthy dollop of sarcasm to boot.

It's easy to knock games like this, yet they provided a successful platform, particularly on the 8-bits. *Seymour* helped to prop up the likes of the CPC, C64 and Spectrum when most software houses were leaving. In doing so, he provided a cool romp that really must be played.



» [Amstrad] Small things please small creatures, it seems.



» [Amstrad] Tree action in a scene reminiscent of a *Dizzy* game.

THE CLASSIC GAME

STUNT CAR RACER



Geoff Crammond is well-known for his racing simulators, from Formula Three BBC Micro hit *REVS* through to his popular *Grand Prix* series on the PC. For a brief moment in 1989, however, Crammond dispensed with the realism and instead decided for one glorious game to answer the following question: What would happen if someone decided to merge drag racing and rollercoasters?

The result is one of the greatest racing videogames of all time, tasking you with flinging your rugged racing car around eight perilous circuits, aiming to avoid killing yourself in the process. Join Craig Grannell on the starting grid as **Retro Gamer** explores this classic Amiga game.



THE NEW BOY

You begin the game as a newcomer, down in Division 4, battling also-rans. On the plus side, the game at least enables you to use your own name and not be Mr Anonymous.



ROAD HOG

When John Major left politics, he entered the dangerous world of racing (or so it would seem); Road Hog's easy to beat, though – use boost to zoom past on any straight.



DARE DEVIL

Your first major test, Dare Devil (or Spock to his friends) is an adversary in Division 3. Overtake him on a bend, and ensure you don't allow him to ram you off the track.



BIG ED

For some reason that isn't entirely clear, Big Ed likes to wheelie. Wheelies slow you down, but don't seem to affect him, the cheating swine. Leap over him or boost past on a corner.



THE DODGER

Your toughest test in Division 2, The Dodger is a battler. In lower divisions, fall off the track and you'll lose; against The Dodger, you need to avoid any mistakes to win.



HOT ROD

With his blond quiff and shiny teeth you want to punch, Hot Rod looks dashing, but he races like a man possessed. Follow him, then boost, swerve and overtake on the last lap.

MEMORABLE MOMENTS

WHY IS IT A CLASSIC?



It's vrooming great

Videogames are always at their best when they're thrilling and exciting. When based around real-world things, it's the feel that's most important, and yet racers (with a few exceptions, such as *OutRun 2*) these days tend to prefer a kind of 'TV realism'. By contrast, *Stunt Car Racer* is unashamedly an arcade game. It's meant to be fun, and it feels great as you hurl your car round tracks, into corners, and use boost to scream away from opponents. The absurd track design of course adds to the brilliance, providing a unique and exhilarating racing experience.

BEST OPPONENT



Clue: it's not the computer

Stunt Car Racer has a pretty good go at injecting a little personality into the various rivals you face. There are clear differences between the ways the characters behave, and the difficulty curve is reasonable throughout, with drivers in the higher divisions proving much tougher to beat. However, the computer AI never falls off the track (even if you ram your opponent's car) and feels rather robotic when you've played the game a lot. Luckily, you can link two Amigas together and play head-to-head (although each player needs their own Amiga and their own television or monitor).

SNEAKIEST SECTION



Acute racing game

Crammond is a devious sort when it comes to track design, and even some of *Stunt Car Racer*'s easier tracks have nasty surprises lurking (try careening round The Hump Back and you'll likely smack into the final corner, for example). Many of the most challenging course components are demanding jumps that force you to be at full speed before launching your car into the air, but our favourite sneaky moment occurs at the end of The High Jump. Immediately after one of the last corners, a straight runs at a 45-degree angle, which frequently catches us out.

BEST TRACK



It's a rollercoaster

The Hump Back's undulating track is glorious; The Little Ramp's simplicity is great for speed runs; The Ski Jump is thrilling; The Draw Bridge (including an actual drawbridge that raises and lowers) is totally bonkers. For us, though, nothing beats Division 2 track The Roller Coaster. The circuit is, believe it or not, laid out like a rollercoaster, and bar a first corner that you must take slowly (or you fly right off the track), it's mostly a hell-for-leather circuit that finds you giddily belting down perilous slopes and then boosting up massive inclines.

BEST FEATURE



Damage limitation

Damage modelling is a contentious area of modern racers: too realistic and gamers get frustrated while sponsors moan that 'their' cars are getting ruined on-screen; avoid it entirely and risk-and-reward becomes absent. *Stunt Car Racer* matches its arcade sensibilities with a straightforward yet brilliant car-damage mechanic. Rough landings and collisions result in 'chassis crack' progressing from left to right. Dreadful landings punch holes in the chassis, speeding up the crack's progress, and holes are only repaired at the season's end.

BEST-KEPT SECRET



The sequel that never was

In April 2003, *Stunt Car Racer* fans got properly excited when it was revealed Geoff Crammond was working on *Stunt Car Racer Pro*, but it was sadly canned (back in **Retro Gamer 69**, Crammond said: "My business manager calls it the best game he never sold"). However, Amiga owners can at least get a little bit of extra *Stunt Car Racer* magic via AmiGer's The New Tracks patch; the update amends the race colours, adjusts the AI and, most importantly, provides eight new tracks, including Dizzy Descent, Witty Way, Crazy Caper, Amazing Adept and Rat Race.

What the press said… ages ago

Commodore User (Dec '89), 92%

"The graphics are incredible, and that doesn't only apply to the movement of the track in relation to you. It's almost worth losing the race so that you can follow the other car along the track, watching it bounce along realistically. An amazing game, almost perfect in fact. A 'must buy' for all Amiga owners."

Amiga Format (Jan '90), 93%

"This is gripping stuff. Action all the way – you really will be holding your breath as you go flying over the jumps and gritting your teeth with determination when you see your opponent go whizzing past. All it lacks is an instant replay option to allow an out-of-cockpit view of those spectacular crashes."

What we think

With its filled vectors, it might look old-fashioned – even a little *Hard Drivin'* – but *Stunt Car Racer* still provides the goods where it matters: the controls are tight and tuned to perfection, the physics are rugged and enjoyably arcade-like, and the track designs are great.



IN THE KNOW

- **PLATFORM:** AMIGA
- **PUBLISHER:** MICROPROSE/MICROPLAY
- **DEVELOPER:** GEOFF CRAMMOND FOR MICROSTYLE
- **RELEASED:** 1989
- **GENRE:** RACING
- **EXPECT TO PAY:** £5



FROM THE ARCHIVES

RETRO GAMER DIGS UP THE FILES OF THE CLASSIC COMPANIES OF OLD

Virgin Games Part 1

Virgin's involvement in games started modestly, but it grew into an international publisher worth hundreds of millions. In this first instalment, Richard Hewison looks back at the birth of Virgin Games

Oxford University graduate Nick Alexander started his working life at British Rail in the Seventies, then quickly moved on to EMI and then HMV Retail, where he became the company's marketing manager. However, retail marketing wasn't really where he wanted to be, and as a new year dawned he started looking at the exciting new frontier of home computers and videogames.

"I got into the computer games business at the beginning of '82 when I started working at Thorn EMI Video Programmes," he remembers. In the early Eighties Thorn EMI was developing ambitious video disc programmes for the VHD Video Disc System, which sadly failed to appear outside Japan. Thankfully, its home computer software division was producing games for more familiar formats like the Atari 400/800 and the Commodore VIC-20, but it wasn't too long before Alexander began getting frustrated.

"I wanted to get more directly involved with creating products and I also wanted to do something international," he explains. "In '82 the market was just beginning to take off, with lots of people starting to write games, and I started thinking about setting up a computer games company of my own. Everybody else was – why shouldn't I?"

In what turned out to be a career-defining moment, Alexander then received an unexpected telephone call from a very famous entrepreneur.

"I got a call from Richard Branson, who wanted me to become managing director of Virgin Retail," says Alexander with a smile. "So I went to see him and had a very strange interview where he tried to offer me the job to run Virgin Retail, and instead I replied saying that I was actually thinking of starting my own computer games company."

Richard Branson's response was quick and straight to the point, as Alexander remembers with some clarity: "He said, 'Yeah, why don't you come and do that, and perhaps you can come and help us with some other things as well.'"

No further questions; just a simple 'yes' to what must have been an unexpected proposition as far as Richard Branson was concerned. "But that's just the kind of guy he is," says Alexander, remembering the moment fondly.

What now?

Alexander started Virgin Games in early 1983, on his own and with very little idea of what to do next. "It was my first start-up business, so I phoned Richard Branson and asked, 'What can I get on with and what do I need to talk to you about?' because I reported directly to him and he basically just said to get on with it and 'I'll give you a call every couple of weeks and you can tell me what's going on'," he recalls, laughing. Being given free rein to run the new company sounds like an ideal situation, but it wasn't always like that.

"The drawback is that, on occasion, you do want to talk something through with somebody, and Virgin was diversifying into more and more things back then so it was

INSTANT EXPERT

Virgin Games' launch party in 1983 included a Maggie Thatcher lookalike, some programmers, and a signing session with Richard Branson. The launch was held at the Roof Gardens on top of the old Derry & Toms building in Kensington High Street, London.

Virgin used to organise annual weekends away, and Virgin Games went to Portugal in 1983 to help Richard Branson celebrate the tenth anniversary of Virgin Records being founded. As the Virgin empire grew, it became impossible for entire companies to join in, so participation became more fragmented. One year, some Virgin Games employees got to spend a long weekend away with Richard Branson in Jersey, enjoying rides in the Virgin hot air balloon, go-kart racing and various other activities.

Virgin Interactive Publishing produced an LV-ROM product in 1987 called *North Polar Expedition* for a suitably equipped BBC Master computer. It was billed as a "multi-role educational adventure" and included a copy of Ranulph Fiennes' book, *To The Ends Of The Earth*, which detailed the first pole-to-pole circumnavigation of the globe. The product sold around a hundred copies. It was later resurrected by Virgin Multimedia for the Commodore CDTV in 1992.



“We got hundreds of games sent to us, and most were from 14 to 18-year-old boys”

ON THE ORIGIN OF VIRGIN GAMES' INITIAL CROP OF RELEASES



sometimes a little frustrating,” elaborates Alexander. After a few weeks of solitude, he began recruiting additional staff.

“I brought in Angela Fitzgerald, who organised the office, and Hugh Band came on board as marketing director, so initially there were just the three of us in the office working very long hours.”

The office in question was at 61-63 Portobello Road in central London, but it wasn't an ideal working environment.

“Unfortunately we had no windows, so it often felt like we were completely cut off from the world. Sometimes we would go outside and discover it had been snowing, and other times we would realise it was a hot, sunny day,” remembers Alexander. “Virgin Publishing and Virgin Video were in the same building, and once we came out of the office and there was Boy George standing there, so it was interesting and all quite a laugh!”

Games

With the office up and running, the next task was to get some product to sell. Virgin attracted submissions by issuing a press release announcing that the company was looking for titles to publish.

“We got hundreds of games sent to us,” says Alexander, “and most were from 14 to 18-year-old boys programming in their bedrooms.” A number of games were selected as Virgin's launch titles, including a sheepdog trials game called *Sheepwalk*, which Alexander thought “was actually very innovative”; *Golf*; *Starfire*, which was a version of the classic unofficial *Star Trek* tactical game; *Mission Mercury*; *Landfall*; a graphical exploration game called *Space Adventure*; and *Bug Bomb*. Later titles included *Dr Franky And The Monster*, *Angler*, *Ghost Town*, *Ambush* and *Bitmania*, to name a few. In hindsight, the quality of some of those early titles was questionable.

“In all honesty, judging the games wasn't really our forte,” admits Alexander. “We were very good at marketing but not so good at knowing what was a hot property and what wasn't.”

Despite the lack of high-quality titles, Virgin Games did very well in its first year, and it also had a slightly different slant to its marketing.

“I had this idea of promoting programmers like recording stars, so we included a picture and a biography of the programmer with the game that they had written,” explains Alexander. “We had the program on one side of the tape and we got some specially edited music from Steve Hillage or other Virgin acts on the other.”

The front of the inlays were very colourful, using large diagonal stripes and different colour combinations for different formats – green and pink stripes for the Commodore 64, blue and pink for the Spectrum, and so on. The advertisements placed in magazines covered multiple

BY THE NUMBERS

1 Nick Alexander started Virgin Games with just one employee – himself!

3 The number of *Dan Dare* games published by Virgin Games.

4 The number of European territories to which Virgin Mastertronic distributed Sega products.

5 The number of *Now Games* compilations released by Virgin Games between 1985 and 1988.

8 The number of years that Virgin Games ran until it was split into two, forming Sega Europe as a result

27 How old Nick Alexander was when he first started Virgin Games in 1983.

45 The initial minority percentage stake that Virgin bought in Mastertronic in 1987.

100 Sales figures for Virgin Interactive Publishing's *North Polar Expedition* on LV-ROM, a format based on LaserDisc.

300 Richard Branson is one of the 300 richest people in the world, with an estimated fortune of £2.97 billion.



» [Spectrum] Richard Branson got to appear in the *Virgin Atlantic Challenge* game in 1986.

"Buying Leisure Genius outright was good business that kept going year after year"

WHY VIRGIN EXPANDED AND BOUGHT LEISURE GENIUS IN 1986

TIMELINE

1982 NICK ALEXANDER ASKS RICHARD BRANSON TO LET HIM SET UP A COMPUTER GAMES PUBLISHING COMPANY

1983 VIRGIN GAMES' FIRST TITLES ARE RELEASED IN THE SUMMER

1984 VIRGIN GAMES TRIES ITS HAND AT BOARD GAMES WITH HYPE, BUT FAILS MOSTLY DUE TO A HIGH RRP



CHRIS SIEVEY

Chris Sievey – who sadly died earlier this year aged just 54 – wrote *The Biz* for Virgin Games, which was a pop music strategy game on the Spectrum.

He was perhaps best known for being in the pop group the Freshies and for creating and inhabiting the papier-mâché-headed Frank Sidebottom, a character originally introduced on the B-side of *The Biz*'s cassette.

As Frank, Chris appeared in TV and radio shows, and the character also toured as a stand-up comedian in the late Eighties and early Nineties.

games, and also featured a curious mascot called the Laughing Shark.

"I was pretty rubbish at drawing, but I used to do this cartoon character at university called Laughing Shark, so we used him as a mascot, although thankfully he was professionally realised for us by an artist called Dave Dragon," says Alexander with a huge grin.

He also came up with the idea of a Virgin Games tour: "We bought a double-decker bus [the former Southampton #104], decorated it in black and white stripes with the Laughing Shark on the side, kitted it out with computers, and then took it round the country to shopping centres and schools, and that generated a lot of publicity."

Other marketing ploys enticed customers to join a club called the Virgin Games Gang, which included a newsletter with competitions, news and offers. However, just as Virgin Games was making progress, the industry threw a serious wobble.

Changes

"The bottom dropped out of the market at the beginning of '84," remembers Alexander. "In '82 all the retailers had run out of stock and weren't carrying any inventory, so they all over-ordered in '83. You have to remember that at this point there were hundreds of computer game publishers in the UK alone, and as a result they all produced more product than they had the year before to meet this perceived demand, which then didn't appear."

While a number of publishers were feeling the squeeze, a new company appeared in 1984 that changed the market forever. With a low £1.99 price point for games that were similar to, and in some cases better than, games selling for three times the price, Mastertronic's approach was innovative, and it had a huge effect on the economics of selling games.

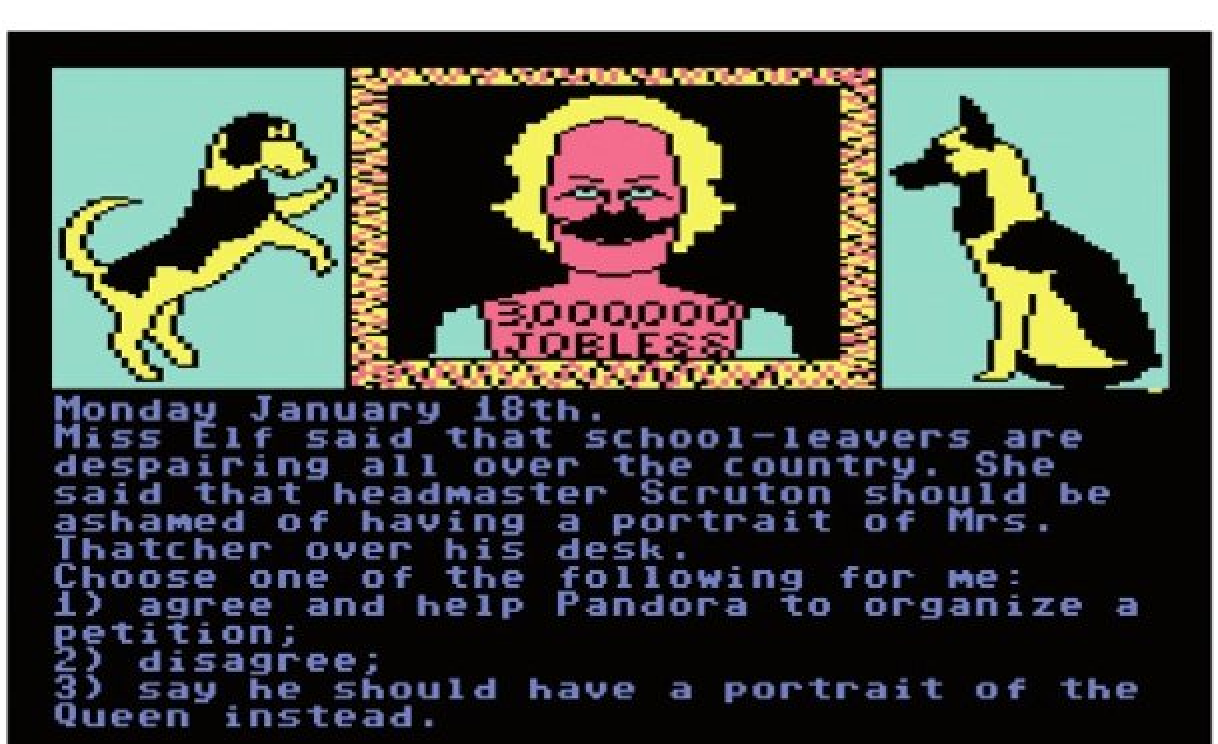
"The wholesale price of a typical game dropped from around £3.80 to about 35 pence in just two or three weeks, so that wasn't very good!" reveals Alexander with some candour.

"Ultimate Play the Game also came out with their Spectrum games around the same time, which blew everything else out of the water, and we didn't really have a clue how to respond to it," he admits. What he did know was that they would have to up their game if Virgin was to survive in what had become a very cut-throat market, so new staff were recruited, including technical manager Steve Webb, as well as commercial director Jeremy Cook and Patricia Mitchell, who were both former colleagues of Alexander's from his Thorn EMI days.

"I could see the writing on the wall at Thorn EMI so I decided I would leave," remembers Mitchell. "Nick Alexander was obviously in an exciting position having gone off to work with Richard Branson, so I gave Nick a call and basically said 'gissa job'!"

Mitchell originally joined as a programmer, thanks in part to her experience of assembler on the Atari 800. She started working on *Save The Hippie* for the Commodore 64, but this was eventually abandoned as Virgin Games began a process of re-evaluating its products and practices. As a result, her role changed and she began evaluating the game submissions that were still coming in by post. She also started writing the instructions and copy that appeared on the cassette inlays.

A new policy of releasing fewer games but of a much higher quality than before



» [Amstrad] Level 9 Computing's second *Adrian Mole* game was taken on by Virgin after Mosaic disappeared.



» Nick Alexander (middle, arms crossed) and a host of programmers gathering outside the Virgin Tour Bus in 1983.

1984 — VIRGIN GAMES' MARKETING TEAM IS LOANED TO HELP LAUNCH THE VIRGIN ATLANTIC AIRLINE BETWEEN APRIL AND JUNE

1984 — VIRGIN GAMES ANNOUNCES A CHANGE IN PUBLISHING PHILOSOPHY, DROPPING SOME GAMES, REDUCING PRICES ON OTHERS AND PROMISING TO UP THE QUALITY IN FUTURE

1985 — RABBIT SOFTWARE IS BOUGHT BY VIRGIN GAMES, AND THE ACQUISITION IS ANNOUNCED IN HYDE PARK

1985 — THE FIRST NOW GAMES COMPILATION IS RELEASED ON THE SPECTRUM WITH GAMES FROM BEYOND, VIRGIN, THE EDGE, MIKRO-GEN AND INTERCEPTOR SOFTWARE

1986 — LEISURE GENIUS SEEKS TO EXPAND AND IS BOUGHT BY VIRGIN GAMES

1986 — VIRGIN GAMES PUBLISHES DAN DARE FOR THE 8-BIT FORMATS TO GREAT ACCLAIM

1987 — VIRGIN GAMES INITIALLY BUYS 45 PER CENT STAKE IN MASTERTRONIC

1988 — VIRGIN GAMES BUYS THE REMAINING 55 PER CENT OF MASTERTRONIC AND CREATES VIRGIN MASTERTRONIC

1988 — VIRGIN MASTERTRONIC BECOMES UK, FRENCH AND GERMAN DISTRIBUTOR FOR SEGA

1990 — SEGA EXTENDS THE DISTRIBUTION DEAL WITH VIRGIN MASTERTRONIC TO INCLUDE SPAIN

1991 — VIRGIN MASTERTRONIC'S SALES AND MARKETING DEPARTMENT IS SOLD TO SEGA

1991 — NICK ALEXANDER LEAVES VIRGIN MASTERTRONIC TO RUN SEGA EUROPE

was agreed. *Strangeloop* by Charles Goodwin and *Sorcery* on the Spectrum by Martin Wheeler were certainly vast improvements on previous Virgin releases. Other titles included *The Biz*, which was a *Football Manager*-style game set within the music industry, and *Falcon Patrol 2*.

More in-house developers came onboard, including Andy Wilson, Ian Mathias, Charles Goodwin, Simon Birrell and Dave Chapman, and the entire company moved to another building just round the corner, at 2-4 Vernon Yard.

"We moved out of Portobello Road because we had outgrown the office," explains Alexander. "Virgin Records had just vacated Vernon Yard, and although it was a decrepit building, it had a wonderfully lucky character all of its own."

Winging it

While other software publishers were content to release flight simulators for home computers, Virgin Games went one better and ended up getting involved in the real thing, as Alexander reveals.

"In '84 Richard [Branson] decided to get involved in the airline business and started Virgin Atlantic, and because I knew something about marketing he asked if I would be the marketing director for its first year. Because games were doing nothing at that point I took virtually everybody off Virgin Games – which was about seven or eight of us – and we became the marketing department for Virgin Atlantic!" he recalls incredulously. "It was just completely bonkers. We were responsible for the air hostesses' uniform, the in-flight food, the in-flight entertainment, the magazine, the aircraft livery… We really didn't have a clue at all!"

With the majority of staff on loan, a small team of in-house programmers and technical people kept Virgin Games ticking over, including Patricia Mitchell, who got to look after marketing while everyone else was off playing with aeroplanes.

"I was deemed the most suitable person because I was already doing the copy-writing, and I took on production too while Nick, Hugh Band and the others were away," she explains.



Virgin Atlantic got permission to fly on 1 April 1984 and the first flight was in late June, so that three-month period was, as Alexander puts it, "totally ridiculous, but then we did put out more product as a computer games company for the autumn".

Acquisitions

Soon after the team had returned to games, Alexander made an opportunistic business decision, buying a fellow publisher that had fallen on hard times.

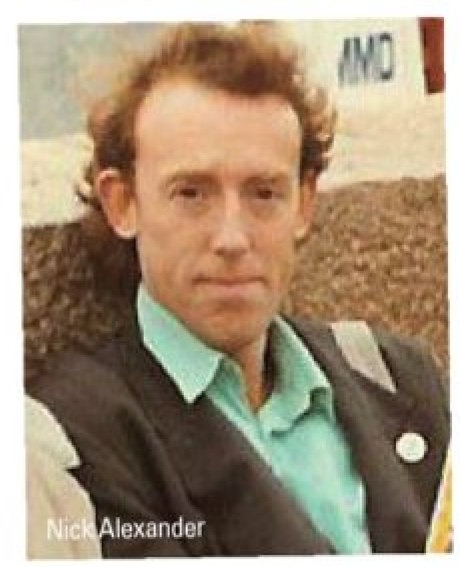
"We bought Rabbit Software because I thought that it would give us some profile and show that we were on the way back after the market collapse," recalls Alexander. "We paid very little for the label, and apart from the launch photos where we were wearing rabbit suits, we didn't do much with it. It was a piece of marketing."

Virgin Games then moved up another few gears and began to lay the foundations that would ultimately turn it into a consistent, high-quality games publisher.

"Later on we bought Leisure Genius," says Alexander. Leisure Genius was originally set up in early 1982 specifically to write home computer versions of *Scrabble* after a British national *Scrabble* champion asked Jon Baldachin if it was possible to program a computer to play the game. After discussing the rules and dissecting how *Scrabble* experts played, he concluded that it was feasible, so he approached Spear's Games, which gave him limited rights. A lucky accident saw Baldachin make contact with a student who was writing a version of *Scrabble* on the Apple II as part of his university PhD.

"Off the back of that Apple II version we got approached by Psion, who were working on the then-unannounced Sinclair Spectrum, and we came to an arrangement to license *Scrabble* development to them. That turned out to be very successful and it allowed us to properly finance the company," remembers Baldachin. One thing led to another, and Leisure Genius ended up with the rights to the most recognisable ▶

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?


Nick Alexander

Nick Alexander

Nick ran Sega Europe for three years after leaving Virgin, then joined Pearson where he bought, ran and then sold Future Publishing. He then became involved in a number of companies including Barrysworld and 365. Nick has also consulted for Lego, Nokia and Ministry of Sound, and was chairman of NaturalMotion, and then Player X. Today Nick is executive chairman at Connect2Media and chairman of Tee Pee Games.

Patricia Mitchell

Having met Nick Alexander when they worked together at Thorn EMI, Patricia Mitchell worked with him at Virgin Games and later went on to work for him at both Sega Europe and Pearson New Entertainment. She also worked for Silicon Artists as a production director. Today she is vice president of sales for iProfile, a company that sells business intelligence online to IT companies.


Patricia Mitchell

Andrew Wright

Andrew left Virgin and moved to Sega Europe in 1993. He also worked for BMG Interactive, Bastion, Golden Casket and Krome Studios and spent some time working in online gambling. Andrew is currently involved in a number of online companies, including Fabulous.com and Drop.com.au.


Andrew Wright

Jon Baldachin

Jon left Virgin Games a few years after Virgin bought Leisure Genius to go freelance, writing the C64 version of *Monopoly*. He then left games publishing completely and returned to working in IT in the financial sector. Today, Jon is director of Forward Thinking – a company that provides help and advice to small and medium-sized enterprises.

Steve Clark

After Virgin, Steve joined Pearson to work on Europe Online, then moved to BT Wireplay. When that didn't last, Steve set up a consultancy business doing contract work for clients including Carlton, Sainsbury's, M&S and Sky. In 2006 he joined Gamesys, the e-gambling company behind Jackpotjoy and Sun Bingo but recently left and is now freelancing again in technology, mobile and e-gambling.


Steve Clark

SIX OF THE BEST



Sorcery (Amstrad CPC)
The Amstrad CPC version of Martin Wheeler's original Spectrum game was enhanced and improved when Dave Chapman converted it for the Amstrad CPC range, including colourful graphics and quick, incisive gameplay.



The Biz (Spectrum)
Although it might have looked a bit dull, this text-only strategy title somehow managed to create a strangely addictive game where you could end up as big as Culture Club or Duran Duran. Who needs *The X Factor*, anyway?



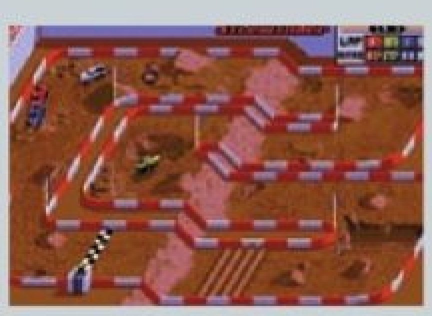
Shogun (Commodore 64)
This sideways-scrolling strategy adventure game based upon James Clavell's novel featured some very clever AI, where killing the right adversaries and making allies of others helped you to achieve Shogun status.



Dan Dare (Spectrum)
A technically excellent game on the Spectrum, giving the player a colourful adventure game but without the usual attribute clash problems associated with the Speccy. This game was hugely popular and for good reason.



The Ninja Warriors (Amiga)
The Sales Curve and Random Access produced a superb conversion of the Taito coin-op in 1989, cramming the three-screen display into a widescreen format. It also avoided interruption to the action by introducing the dynamic loader system.



Super Off Road (Amiga)
Graftgold created marvellous versions for both 8-bit and 16-bit platforms of this *Super Sprint* clone. It featured tiny cars, cash prizes that allowed the player to upgrade their vehicle, and some great multiplayer racing action.

THREE TO AVOID



Yomp (Spectrum)
The Virgin launch titles from 1983 are an easy target, but *Yomp* was basically a poor *Frogger* clone. The in-game preamble described para platoons, enemy vehicles, radar scanners and minefields. The ruse worked right up until the player played the game.



The FA Cup (Spectrum/Commodore 64/Amstrad CPC)
Apparently designed by sports journalist Tony Williams, this FA Cup game was nicely presented but had minimal input from the player and was almost totally text-based. *Football Manager* did it better a few years before this game came out.



Bitmania (Commodore 64)
Yes, another of Virgin's earliest releases and a shoot-'em-up with very few redeeming features. Sparse graphics, basic gameplay and very little to recommend. You can survive for a long time by hugging the bottom of the screen and not doing anything!

board game brands in the world, including *Monopoly*, *Cluedo* and *Risk*, as well as *Scrabble* and *Scalextric* on a wide variety of different platforms. By 1985, fellow founder Peter Deutsch felt that to take the company to the next level it needed new investment, so he approached Virgin Games.

"Buying Leisure Genius outright was good, solid business that kept going year after year because we were able to do new versions of the games for all the new formats, and it gave us good, stable revenues," explains Alexander. As part of the deal, Jon Baldachin and most of his team joined Virgin Games. Baldachin became director of software, and he had a fundamental effect on the in-house programming team.

"At Leisure Genius we had created a development network infrastructure based on some early Apple hardware and used it as a central library with version control," says Baldachin. With this high-speed serial 'ring' network installed at Virgin, they were able to separate bespoke code for graphics and sound from the central game code, which made writing conversions a much more efficient process than before.

"What I brought in was a more formal approach that introduced more structure," Baldachin explains. "It took a bit longer at the beginning, but once it was done it was much faster to write and test the code."

Compilations and challenges

In 1985, Virgin Games started releasing a series of compilations featuring games from a variety of publishers, including itself. Inspired by EMI and Virgin's joint *Now That's What I Call Music* chart compilations, this new series was called *Now Games*, and five compilations were produced between 1985 and 1988.

"The first few *Now Games* did quite well, then the other publishers realised that they could do compilations too, so why should they license their games to us?" laughs Alexander.

1986 was a very productive year, including successful high-profile releases like *Dan Dare*, based on the famous Fifties British sci-fi character; an official FA Cup football game; a game based on James Clavell's bestselling novel *Shogun*; and the Leisure Genius products. There was even time for some nepotism in the guise of the *Virgin Atlantic Challenge* game, which tied in with Richard Branson's ultimately successful second attempt at crossing the Atlantic in the Virgin Atlantic Challenger II boat. Virgin Games followed that title the following year by releasing *Trans-Atlantic Balloon Challenge*, based on Richard Branson and Per Lindstrand's successful Atlantic crossing in a hot-air balloon.

Sega master stroke

While Richard Branson was finding new ways to cross the Atlantic, 1987 proved to be a pivotal turning point in the fortunes of Virgin Games and ultimately its managing director, Nick Alexander.

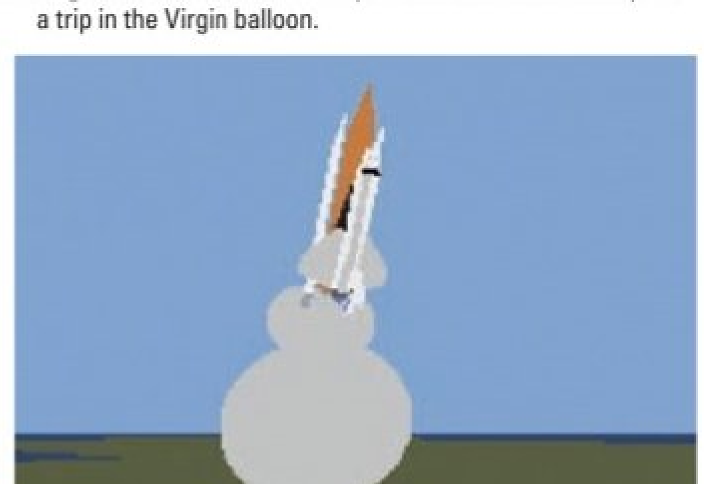
"That year we bought a minority 45 per cent stake in Mastertronic," he states. "At the time they were the kings of budget software and we bought them because budget software was taking a larger share of the market."

But why would Mastertronic want to sell part of its business to another publisher? Alexander provides the answer: "They needed to raise some money because they wanted the UK distribution rights for Sega products, and Sega Japan would only deal with companies who were able to pay in advance."

At first, things appeared to go well. Mastertronic pre-sold 25,000 Master



» Virgin's annual weekend away included a visit to Jersey and a trip in the Virgin balloon.



» [Amiga] Virgin's *Space Shuttle Simulator* for the Amiga, ST and PC was incredibly detailed.



» Nick Alexander and Richard Branson at the Virgin Games launch party in 1983.



» Virgin's *Scrabble* conversion running on France Telecom's Minitel system.



MINITEL SCRABBLE

Programmer Steve Clark was employed by Nick Alexander and Jon Baldachin in 1987 to write an online version of *Scrabble* for France's Minitel system that proved to be very lucrative for Virgin Games.

Baldachin remembers how it happened: "France is a nation of avid *Scrabble* players, and we were approached by Albert Loridan of Micromania. He brokered a deal between us and France Telecom to supply Minitel with online *Scrabble* that people paid for through their phone bill."

Clark's job was to convert the original PC code to run as the back-end on an Altos 80286-based system running Xenix. He first optimised the code, then wrote what were effectively APIs that allowed the back-end code to link with the front-end being written by Albert Loridan's team in France.

Clark then flitted between France and the UK to get the job done, writing some very clever code that allowed the system to run 256 games simultaneously, each with up to 256 players. The Minitel service called SCRAB was a huge success when it was launched in 1988. It was so robust that the game was still running bug-free over ten years later!

"Virgin were struggling to fund the marketing and Sega wanted more and more control" THE DIVISION OF VIRGIN MASTERTRONIC

Systems and 55,000 cartridges in the run-up to Christmas. "Unfortunately, Sega then delivered all of the products on Boxing Day, which meant that Mastertronic and all of their distributors found themselves in a cash flow crisis because they had paid up front for products that turned up late and the retailers cancelled all their orders," remembers Alexander.

Sega's French distributor, Master Games, got into financial trouble as a result, and its German distributor, Bertelsmann, which was part of BMG, had enough and refused to deal with Sega ever again.

As a result of the Christmas fiasco, Mastertronic needed to sell the remaining 55 per cent of the business to Virgin or risk going bankrupt. In what was a complex business deal, Mastertronic's founding members – Frank Herman, Martin Alper and Alan Sharam – remained with the company. Virgin therefore became the sole owner of a new business venture branded Virgin Mastertronic, and in early 1988 Alexander was approached by Sega and asked if Virgin wanted the French, German and UK distribution rights.

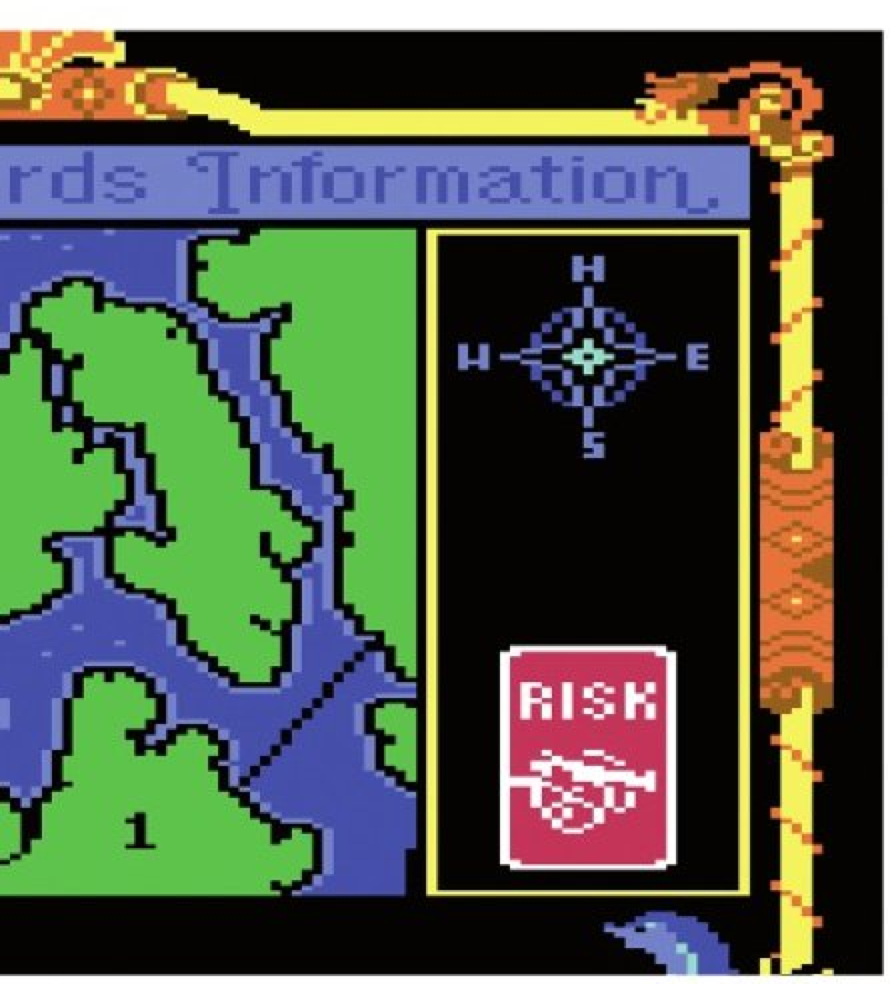
"I thought it was a good idea so I said yes," says Alexander, understating the importance of that decision. Sega's Master System games console ended up doing well in Europe, and was to be followed by the phenomenal success of the 16-bit Sega Mega Drive. Virgin also got to publish a number of home computer conversions of Sega coin-ops as a result of this deal, including *Golden Axe* and *Shinobi*.

Soon afterwards, Andrew Wright joined Virgin Mastertronic as budget product manager, bringing with him a wealth of experience in PR.

"I was initially responsible for product acquisition and marketing for the Mastertronic label," says Wright. His main responsibilities were co-ordinating the marketing campaigns, public relations, package design and looking after the instruction manuals. He also got to work closely with the development department regarding product selection.

Wright clearly relished working at Virgin despite it being a very busy transitional period when he first joined: "I'm not sure that Virgin really understood what they'd got when they first bought Mastertronic, so it was challenging to integrate the businesses."

Meanwhile, the internal development team expanded, with relative industry veteran David Bishop joining in 1989, initially as a producer and then games designer. By then, Virgin was publishing a huge range of games across multiple platforms, with 16-bit titles beginning to dwarf 8-bit games by some degree.



Divide and conquer

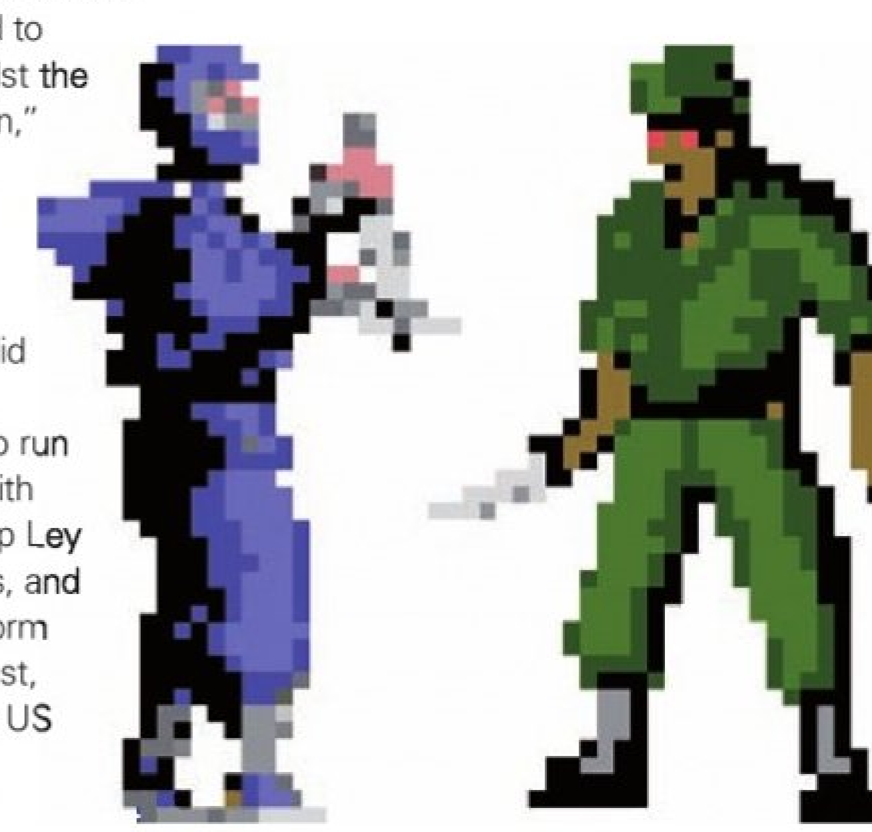
Virgin Games continued to grow, and in 1990 it extended its distribution deal with Sega for another three years, this time including distribution in Spain. Just a year later, Virgin Mastertronic was spending more and more money on marketing Sega's products in Europe, to the point where it eclipsed the games publishing business. The imbalance hadn't gone unnoticed by Virgin Games' MD.

"In the City they often described the Virgin empire as 'fully invested', which meant that any profits went into starting up new businesses, so we never had any money of our own," he laughs. "When you consider the kind of margins we were making on the Sega distribution deal, Virgin were struggling to fund the marketing and Sega wanted more and more control of their European distributor."

This all came to a head in 1991 when it was decided to split Virgin Games into two separate businesses. "The sales and marketing part of Virgin was sold to Sega and I went to run that, whilst the publishing part was kept by Virgin," recalls Alexander. That decision ended his eight-year association with Virgin Games and Richard Branson. It was an amicable split, and was made for good solid business reasons.

So, Nick Alexander went off to run the new Sega Europe venture with fellow marketing colleagues Philip Ley and Simon Morris, among others, and Virgin Games prepared to transform itself into a radically different beast, under the stewardship of former US Gold supremo, Tim Chaney...

To be continued...



» YOUR ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO FORGOTTEN GAME SYSTEMS

OBSCURA MACHINA

#2 Capcom Power System CHANGER





» The Capcom Power Stick Fighter is considered one of the best controllers for the CPS CHANGER system.







» This flyer shows the various CPS CHANGER packages that could be ordered direct from Capcom Japan.

JUST THE FACTS

The Capcom Power Stick Fighter Cordless Adapter allowed the CPS CHANGER to be controlled with the Capcom Power Stick Fighter joysticks via infrared.

The machine was only available direct from Capcom Japan via mail order, and was never officially sold in videogame shops.

The system was available to order from two sets. The Triple Set – which consisted of the CPS CHANGER, Power Stick Fighter and *Street Fighter II': Hyper Fighting* cost ¥39,800, while the Double Set (CPS CHANGER with *Street Fighter II': Hyper Fighting*) was ¥34,800.

13 games were released in total, with a technically watered down conversion of the CPS II game *Street Fighter Alpha* being the final release.

The machine uses Super Famicom controllers.

Like many Japanese consoles, the CPS CHANGER does not support an RGB signal out of the box, but can be modified to do so.

The CPS CHANGER can play most JAMMA+ arcade boards with the use of a correctly made custom loom.

The first 11 games could be ordered at a discount if purchased in bulk. A single title would cost ¥20,000, with three games totalling ¥55,000.

The three Capcom arcade formats represented on the CPS CHANGER were CPS (AKA: CPS-1), CPS (Dash) and CPS II.

The machine was supported by Capcom from 1994 to around 1996.

Back in the early Nineties, home consoles were often judged on their ability to replicate the incredible performance of arcade hardware – then the benchmark for videogame technology. Machines like the PC Engine, Mega Drive and SNES all provided a reasonably authentic experience, but it was SNK's Neo Geo AES that first brought the true coin-op spectacle to the home – albeit at a price that few gamers could realistically afford. SNK wasn't the only company that adopted this strategy, although it is arguably the most famous.

Astonishingly, industry stalwart Capcom also released a domestic version of its then popular coin-op platform range – the Capcom Play System (or CPS for short) – and this machine was blessed with pixel-perfect editions of the company's most renowned hits. Even more amazing is the fact that this console is almost entirely unknown outside of hardcore collecting circles, despite hosting games such as *Final Fight* and *Street Fighter II': Hyper Fighting*.

The Capcom Power System CHANGER was released in Japan in 1994 and allowed gamers to enjoy cutting-edge arcade titles in the comfort of their own home. Like the Neo Geo AES, the CPS CHANGER's library consisted of coin-op titles that had been re-tooled for home use. "CPS CHANGER games obviously have no coin support," explains J A Cullen, originally from Fleet, Hampshire, but now a full-time Tokyo resident and arguably the leading English-speaking expert on the system. "Games can be paused, they have a software reset feature from controller button inputs, a setup configuration and sound test menu available also from controller button inputs at any point in-game." The system's unusual physical appearance has led some so-called experts to dismiss the CPS CHANGER as nothing more than a Capcom-branded Super Gun, a charge that Cullen refutes. "This system is a consumer product in every way and was intended as such," he comments. "It was marketed to consumers and the console and games were specific to the home environment, as opposed to the commercial one. What was offered would be impossible to operate in any arcade."

However, with a little bit of tinkering the CPS CHANGER can be convinced to run standard JAMMA arcade boards – and this fact is probably the reason why so many uneducated types deem it to be a Super Gun rival. "The



Damien McFerran uncovers the story behind Capcom's relatively unknown answer to the Neo Geo AES, and possibly the rarest Japanese home console of all time

» The Capcom Power Stick Fighter Cordless Adapter in all its glory.



CPS CHANGER was purposely not configured to play the standard JAMMA configuration properly, and that coupled with its physical shape meant attempting to do so was troublesome," elaborates Cullen. "This was done by Capcom to reinforce the concept that this was a home machine only. However, I had a custom JAMMA+ loom professionally made that allowed the CPS CHANGER to play most JAMMA+ PCBs perfectly. This should be considered as a bonus for owners."

Compared to the AES, the CPS CHANGER represented surprisingly good value for money, with the system costing around ¥10,000 (£80) less than SNK's console. Software was also, on the whole, less expensive. There was also the disparity in quality to consider. "Capcom's Play System hardware family of games were arguably superior to SNK's own Neo Geo MVS releases in every genre – take the difference between *Burning Fight* and *Final Fight* as an example," states Cullen. "The CPS CHANGER's *Final Fight* is still the only arcade-exact home TV-game version available." Despite the obvious benefits of the machine, it wasn't a bestseller, although Capcom's decision to distribute it exclusively via mail order only suggests that the company wasn't



necessarily looking to beat Sega, Nintendo, NEC and SNK at their own game.

The story of the CPS CHANGER is undeniably intriguing, but just how hard is it to purchase a system today? A seasoned grey importer since the days of the PC Engine and Mega Drive, Cullen's quest to own this most elite of consoles is worthy of a feature in itself. "Upon contacting England's usual grey import companies back in 1994, it transpired that they couldn't get any stock for love nor money because it wasn't available at retail on the Japanese high street and therefore not available through their usual supply chain." he recalls. "It was quickly forgotten by the press and grey importers forever. My desire for ownership never faded and thankfully I finally got an immaculate and complete 'Triple Set' a decade later thanks to some contacts at Capcom Japan. To be honest, the term 'rare' doesn't even come close. I've been game shopping in Tokyo's Akihabara on a monthly basis for close to a decade now and I've never seen one or any of its games for sale over the counter there.

"Only 13 games (including the pack-ins) were advertised to order from Capcom for this system, and there is not one known case of a complete CPS CHANGER hardware and software collection existing anywhere in the world privately – at least to my knowledge. Such a collection would surely smash all records easily if put up for sale. I only know of two other English-speaking current owners – ownership now is an insanely exclusive club to be in."

So there you have it. Many of you reading this feature will probably never have heard of this elusive piece of Japanese hardware, and only the most dedicated and resourceful of individuals will ever get to actually play it. In retro collecting terms, it rests comfortably in the upper echelons. "Forget such things as the Neo Geo AES, the Super Famicom SF-1s, the PC Engine LT, the PC Engine Duo with its colour 4.3-inch monitor, the Marty 1 & Marty 2 or the Car Marty from the same era," says Cullen. "The CPS CHANGER is the rarest officially released Japanese consumer TV-game system in the world. Ever."

PERFECT THREE



FINAL FIGHT

■ Arguably the most influential scrolling beat-'em-up in videogame history, *Final Fight* has been converted to multiple formats but this remains the most authentic version available for a home console.



CAPTAIN COMMANDO

■ Another classic Capcom scrolling brawler, this futuristic title boasts gorgeous graphics, inventive enemies and a baby in a robot suit as a playable character. What more could you ask for?



SFII': HYPER FIGHTING

■ Released at a time when your average gamer would gladly sell a kidney for a truly arcade-perfect version of Capcom's famous one-on-one fighter, this was arguably the CPS CHANGER's killer app.

Thanks go to **J A Cullen** for providing exclusive photographs of his own private collection and taking the time to answer questions for this feature.

Banshee

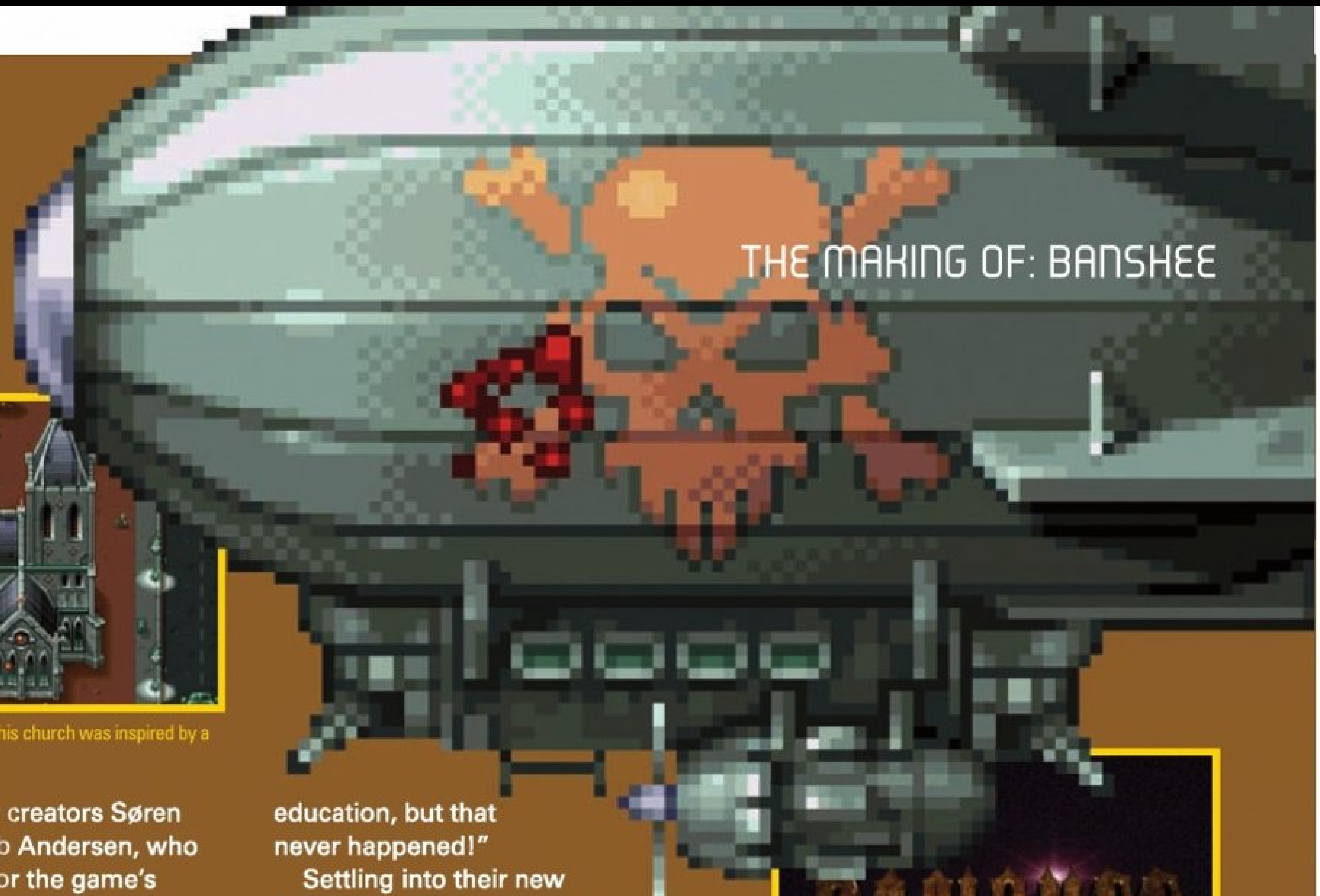


Core's steampunk shooter was one of the last great releases of its kind for the Amiga, and featured some of the system's most handsome graphics. Mike Bevan caught up with designers Søren Hannibal and Jacob Andersen





» [Amiga] Jacob tells us that this church was inspired by a real-life one in Derby.





"Aliens have invaded your world. Go make 'em regret it!" screamed the ad blurb for *Banshee* on its release back in 1994. Not the most original of gaming premises we'll admit, but through the unlikely alliance between Derby-based Core Design and a couple of Danish ex-demo programmers we got a shoot-'em-up of undeniable panache, dripping with detail, atmosphere and offbeat humour.

Designed exclusively for the late-generation Amiga 1200 and CD32, Banshee was an excellent showcase for the enhanced AGA video chipset, with an impressive 64-colour palette, four huge scrolling levels, large multi-part bosses, weather effects and even SNES-style sprite rotation. Unabashedly drawing inspiration from classic aerial shooters like *1942*, the game's intricate visuals and surreal alternate take on history gave it a character all its own. From improbably named protagonist Sven Svardensvart and his nifty prop-driven fighter, to the smallest detail – dozens of tiny enemy soldiers who cop it in a variety of amusingly animated ways – *Banshee* was clearly a labour of love for creators Søren Hannibal and Jacob Andersen, who were responsible for the game's coding and graphics respectively.

Remarkably, it was the pair's first commercial game, although both had been heavily involved in the Amiga demo scene in their homeland. "I got an Amiga 500 when I was 13," Søren recalls. "I was almost instantly sucked into the demo scene because of a few friends. Since I was spending so much time programming, in a few years I became one of the best demo programmers in Denmark, and was competing with the other top Danish groups. Jacob was in another group, but for some reason we started working together, and we made a few demos [3D Demo I and II released by the Anarchy group and Announce] before we decided to try to put a quick game demo together." The duo submitted their unnamed demo. "I was about to start at an engineering school when we sent our demo to Core," Søren says. "And was actually a bit surprised that they wanted to hire us. I then thought I would go there for a year or two and then return to Denmark to finish my education, but that never happened!"

Settling into their new home following the move from Scandinavia to the Midlands, the pair were faced with the reality of turning the 'bad demo' into a fully functioning arcade-style shooter. Søren reveals that several sources of inspiration from the Amiga games catalogue played a part in shaping *Banshee*, alongside Capcom's arcade game. "*SWIV* was a big influence, and *1942* was another obvious inspiration," he says. "*Battle Squadron* was another fantastic game that we loved, and *Chaos Engine* had a sweet visual style that we really liked. I think *Cannon Fodder* had just come out, so the little people were probably inspired by that. Really, it was a case of a lot of 'wouldn't it be cool if' moments and ideas." As for *Banshee*'s steampunk visual direction, Jacob also admits that *The Chaos Engine* struck a chord. "I've always been a fan of the Bitmap Brothers so obviously my graphics were very inspired by them. The game started out as a straight *1942* clone but we soon realised that if we wanted huge bosses we should twist the setting a bit."

The question as to why the pair wanted to create an AGA-specific game, incompatible with standard Amigas, crops up. "Because we were stupid!" replies Søren wryly. "I couldn't tell you why we picked a machine with such a small market. I think it was because we were hoping the A1200 would take off.



» [Amiga] In the Arctic, Eskimos on skidoos and exploding igloos can really ruin your day. And mind that polar bear…



» [Amiga] You approach the enemy harbour through a foggy estuary packed with bridges and lighthouses.

IN THE KNOW

- » **PUBLISHER:** CORE DESIGN
- » **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE
- » **PLATFORM:** AMIGA 1200, CD32
- » **RELEASED:** 1994
- » **GENRE:** SHOOT-'EM-UP
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** £5+



IT'S IN THE DETAILS

"ONE OF MY FAVOURITE parts of the game are the things that happen if you don't shoot everyone," Søren tells us. "There's a soldier who runs out and jumps straight in the water at the harbour; another falls on a slippery oil slick when he's running. One of the skeletons in the graveyard just falls apart as soon as he jumps out of his grave because he is just too old; another skeleton jumps back into the grave after a while. And the Eskimos that blow up their own igloos just quickly look left and right before detonating them. Level two had some hot air balloons that rotated slightly from left to right. Another team was working on a Sega Mega-CD game at the time and was telling us how their machine could do hardware rotation – I wanted to prove that the Amiga could do the same in software. Also, the clock on level two actually changes on the two clock towers, and, if you shoot the statue in the park, it decapitates the guy standing underneath it…"

The Making Of ... BANSHEE

And of course, Jacob and I were ecstatic to work on a more powerful machine. There were some thoughts on an A500 version, and I think a Sega Mega Drive version, but since the game pushed the A1200 to the limits, both memory, processor, and graphics-wise, it would have been very hard to port."

One thing the A1200 hardware lent itself to was the inclusion of massive levels – the first stage clocks in at an impressive 12 minutes long, encompassing combat over land and sea, with enemy aircraft carriers, submarines, bridges and a harbour complex bristling with enemy vehicles and soldiers. "We saw *SWIV* and thought it was really cool that it didn't load at all," comments Søren. "We compromised and just made really long levels instead, with multiple graphical themes in each. We chose to add a little horizontal scrolling mostly to add more variety to the levels, and so we could 'hide' pickups and allow slightly different paths, if there were enemies in one side of the screen that you didn't want to fight."

For the bad guys, Søren constructed a scripting system capable of controlling attack-wave progression, movement and animation separately. "Mostly the enemy placement was done by Jacob or me playing the level and saying 'it needs more enemies here – what do we have available?'," he says. "We didn't have any real memory issues because the A1200 had much more memory than the A500, and we were used to being really efficient with memory usage from our demo days. The size of the levels was also dictated by the mantra 'we have more memory available, what can we add?' It's interesting that nowadays, when machines have gigabytes of memory, a common philosophy of game design is 'what is essential and what can we remove?'"

The sheer volume and variety of enemies, backgrounds (from cities to ice and desert levels and even a final journey into space) and animation in *Banshee* is remarkable,



» [Amiga] A saucer-like boss with prehensile robotic arms – perfect for punching Banshee pilots right in the cockpit.



» [Amiga] This hulking great aircraft carrier is a no-fly zone teeming with cannons, missile launchers and choppers.

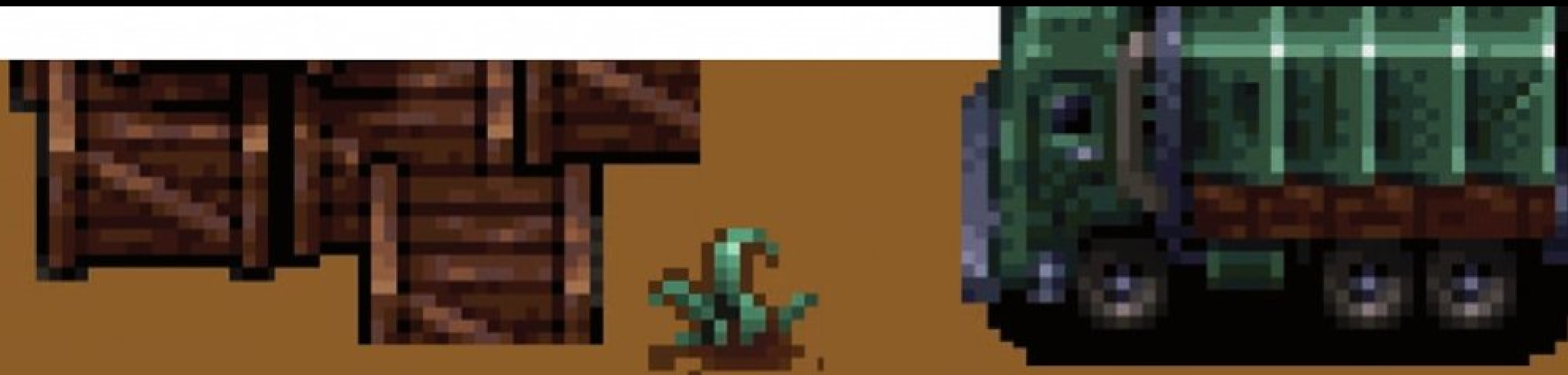


» [Amiga] Trading in your monoplane for the final level in space, where enemy astronauts pop like ripe watermelons.

and Jacob admits that creating it all was a lot of hard work. "Most of the animations were done by hand," he says. "I made the decision to tilt the perspective by 45 degrees so the viewer sees both the top and front of the buildings and vehicles. This was mainly because I thought the top-down perspective used in *SWIV* produced some boring buildings where you could only see the roof. This caused a few problems on the tanks and gun turrets that needed to rotate. In other games you would have a strict top-down view making it easy to just rotate the same sprite. I had to draw every frame separately in perspective. I actually used a Silicon-Graphics workstation running Wavefront."

"Core had purchased five SGI machines to create graphics for Sega-CD games, but nobody used them as Wavefront was quite a complicated program to use at the time. I loved 3D, having played around with Imagine and TurboSilver on the Amiga, so I was just looking for an excuse to nick one of those machines! I rendered simple versions of the gun turrets and used them as reference for the real sprites. Finding reference and inspiration for the graphics was hard because back then we didn't have the internet so I had to find inspiration elsewhere. For instance, I walked around Derby looking at the city, taking notes and making small sketches of buildings. The church in the city level is inspired by a large medieval church in Derby."

Given the strength of the opposition, it's important to equip your *Banshee* fighter with the required hardware to stand a chance of surviving later stages. New weapons can be picked up *Raiden*-style by blasting power-up blocks that cycle through various options from bigger bullets to side-guns, rockets and homing missiles, alongside health pickups and extra lives. "We just wanted to have a bunch of upgrades that could make you feel like you were sweeping the screen clean of enemies," says Søren. "The homing missiles were probably one of the only things in the original demo we sent to Core that were also in the final game. The 'building block' system was added because we wanted people to have







I AM EXQUISITELY EVIL

AS NOTED IN Mark Winstanley's review in *Amiga Power*, alongside the amusingly *Python*-esque death animations of the game's tiny troops, the original build of *Banshee* allowed you to strafe defenceless polar bears, civilians in phone boxes and, at one point, a woman crossing a road pushing a pram. This feature was later removed from default play, possibly to avoid any potential ruckus with the tabloids following the infamous *Cannon Fodder* 'poppy incident'. "We had the polar bear and the civilians in the game for a while before it was decided (I don't remember by whom) that hey, killing women, children and polar bears is maybe not everybody's cup of tea," chuckles Søren. "So we considered removing them, but decided to make it a secret instead – 'I am exquisitely evil' [entered while the game is in attract mode] seemed a perfect fit. The term 'exquisitely evil' had been coined by Guy Miller when he wrote the story for the game."

"Banshee's just a good, honest, rip-roaring, barnstorming powerhouse of a blast-'em-up"



» [Amiga] Level two's final boss is some sort of big, orange, foul-tempered relation of BigTrak.



DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

RICK DANGEROUS
SYSTEM: AMIGA
YEAR: 1989

CHUCK ROCK (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: AMIGA
YEAR: 1991

CURSE OF ENCHANTIA
SYSTEM: AMIGA
YEAR: 1992

TOMB RAIDER
SYSTEM: PSONE
YEAR: 1996

to make a choice between instant upgrades and insuring against losing what you already had."

Søren divulges that *Banshee*'s control system was the subject of a high level of perfectionist fine-tuning. "One thing I was especially proud of was how the plane movement was tweaked, especially the left and right movement," he declares. "I spent days tweaking just that little bit, to get it just right. I personally liked playing the game with the mouse; I just felt that you had more control that way. Oh, and the game was not originally two-player. That was added in halfway through development – we had a meeting where everybody was suggesting what could make the game better, and everybody wanted it, so I had to implement it."

One innovative aspect of the game would later re-appear in more complex arcade shooters such as *Battle Garegga* and *Ibara*. "We had an automatic difficulty adjustment system in there," says Søren, "which adjusted how often enemies shot at you and how much damage you took, depending on how well you were doing (based on the time since you died, how upgraded your ship was, if there were one or two players etc). So when companies talk about their 'dynamic game balancing' systems, well, it's nothing new!"

Despite the balancing system, the pair agree that the game is pretty punishing difficulty-wise, admitting that because it was their first title they hadn't realised how good they had got at it during development. "I probably couldn't complete it these days either," Søren grins. "Although I don't think it's as hard as newer vertical shoot-'em-ups, such as *Ikaruga* – one of my all-time favourite games." Core's in-house testers also became dab hands at the game, it seems. "They got so good that they could play until the very last level before dying," recounts Søren. "This created the worst bug we had – because they had been playing so well, the difficulty adjustment system made a single enemy bullet strong enough to kill the player, but if the health fell from full to zero in one frame, it caused a crash instantly. It took two days to track down – we had no idea what was going on until we managed to record it on VHS and could see it in slow motion."

Banshee's 'kitchen-sink' design philosophy paid off in the long run, resulting in a top-drawer shooter packed with memorable flourishes, and Søren and Jacob tell us that they were delighted with the results. "We had a longer development cycle than most Amiga games: 11 months," says Søren. "Plus we worked our asses off – maybe 10-12 hour days for 6-7 days a week the whole time – not because people told us to, but because it was so cool that someone was paying us to make games!"

"We were given lots of freedom to just shape the game as we liked," adds Jacob. "But at the same time we got a lot of feedback from most of the guys at Core Design. I would have liked it to be longer but we simply ran out of time. One great thing was also that we got to translate the game to our native language, Danish, without anyone correcting anything. I really enjoyed working at Core at that time. 11 or 12 games were being worked on in the company at that time with around 50 people, so there was just so much stuff going on everywhere.

"By the way, as a little curiosity: I was sitting in the same office as Toby Gard at Core and when we had finished *Banshee* he asked me to do the backgrounds for *Tomb Raider* (back when Lara was still a man) but I had to decline because I had already decided to go to America to work for *Scavenger*. Five years later I ended up with the guys from Core (in the form of Eidos), when IO Interactive signed up for *Hitman*. What a small world…"

WHY YOU MUST PLAY…

MASTER OF ORION



» [PC] The planet Aurora I: an arid climate with ultra poor resources. Like **Retro** Towers before we won that award…



» [PC] *MOO*'s research offers no shortage of technologies, weapons upgrades, terraforming improvements and more.



» [PC] Who says a sentient chunk of metal can't teach you about improving planetary conditions?

MICROPROSE'S CIVILIZATION MAY HAVE PAVED THE WAY FOR GRAND-SCALE STRATEGY, BUT IT WAS THIS 1993 CLASSIC THAT TOOK THE HELM FOR EPIC 4X SPACE GAMES. CRAIG RITCHIE SHOWS WHY YOU MUST PLAY MASTER OF ORION



IN THE KNOW

- » **PUBLISHER:** MICROPROSE
- » **DEVELOPER:** SIMTEX
- » **FEATURED HARDWARE:** PC
- » **GENRE:** STRATEGY
- » **RELEASED:** 1993
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** £5+

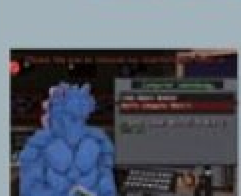
Space – you have to love it. What a grand setting for exploration, discovery, epic-scale battles and all the promise of mysterious wonders on alien worlds. It's arguably the ultimate fantasy playground, and with no shortage of shoot-'em-ups, *Elite*-style free-form combat sims, or sci-fi themed platform games gracing computer screens since *Asteroids* and *Space Invaders* way back when, it was only natural for the final frontier to see a strategy title of epic proportions: enter *Master Of Orion*.

MicroProse was easily the master of the genre for much of the Eighties and Nineties, with perhaps only Maxis's *SimCity* putting up a real fight in the strategy scene of the time. It was no surprise, then, that the company responsible for publishing the likes of *Civilization*, *Transport Tycoon* and *Pirates!* would release the richest, most complex and utterly addictive turn-based space strategy title ever seen, developed by the then-unknown Simtex.

Firing up *Master Of Orion* for the first time in a decade and a half immediately brought back why this is such a classic title. First up is the user interface, which while appearing daunting at first, soon reveals itself to be intricate but not at all cumbersome. In a game so brimming over with options, settings, sub-screens and sub-sub-screens, it was in itself an outstanding feat that *Master Of Orion* got it so right from the beginning. Every aspect, from its colourful galaxy overview through to the ship design and research screens, is intuitive and accessible all the way.

Master Of Orion sports ten varied races, each with their own pros and cons. The Psilons, for example, are the best at researching new technologies, while the Silicoids excel at colonising worlds with harsh environments. As could be expected, interaction with the other races in a particular playthrough takes the form of symbiosis, competition or annihilation. For those not interested in simply going for all-out combat, the depth of *MOO*'s diplomacy is outstanding. Just like in *Civilization*, relations with the opposition have to be kept in check and carefully managed. Technologies can be traded not only out of goodwill but also to see one's megalomaniacal ambitions realised all

WHAT MAKES IT UNIQUE



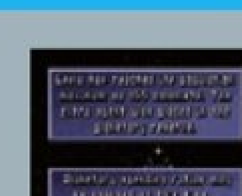
CIVILIZATION IN SPACE
We'd taken mankind from the Stone Age to the stars, but this was the first game to let us conquer space too.



SPACE RACES
The varied races in the game have such distinct personalities that you genuinely feel you're playing against a different civilisation.



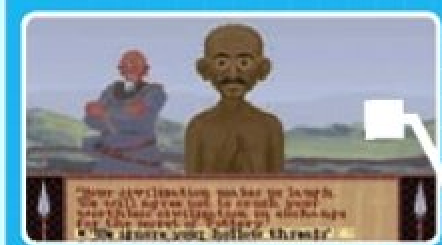
GALACTIC NEWS NETWORK
You have to love the sporadic newsflashes informing you of major galactic events, as well as a rundown of your standings.



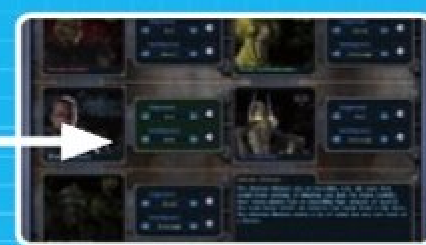
IT'S MASTER OF ORION, DAMN IT!
Simply put, *MOO* is nothing short of a landmark title in the world of space-themed 4X gaming.

INFLUENCES

The games that influenced and have been influenced by **Master Of Orion**



■ CIVILIZATION (1991)
Which 4X strategy title hasn't borrowed from Sid Meier's classic? While not at all derivative, *MOO* definitely shares some similarities.

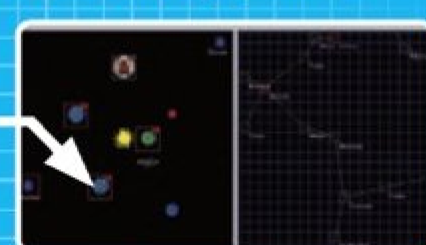


■ GALACTIC CIVILIZATIONS (2003)
This and its brilliant follow-ups owe their success to *Master Of Orion* and are the go-to games for those looking for more *MOO*-style goodness.



■ STAR CONTROL (1990)
Who could deny that certain parts of *Master Of Orion* give a well-deserved nod to Accolade's hybrid strategy/space combat game?

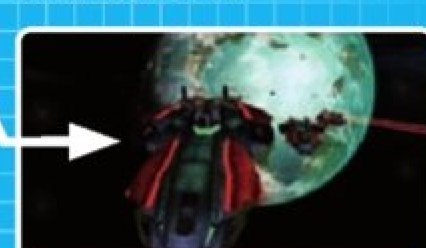




■ SPACE EMPIRES (1993)
While *Space Empires* was released around the same time as *MOO* and is more focused on combat, the similarities are clear.



■ STAR LORDS (2001)
Released as a freeware download nearly a decade after *Master Of Orion* hit the shelves, *Star Lords* is the game's original prototype.



■ SWORD OF THE STARS (2006)
This is one of the more recent re-imaginings of *Master Of Orion* and, as such, sports the flashiest graphics in the genre. A sequel is due in 2011.

"Even Alpha Centauri couldn't take the top spot of the sci-fi 4X-ers"

the more rapidly. The ends define the means, don't forget, and so spying, deception and good old abuse of trust are all used to achieve the noble goal of galactic domination. After all, that's why we're here, right?

But no matter how much charisma you may bring to your interstellar negotiations, no one conquers the universe without firing off a few missiles and blasting their share of lasers. *Master Of Orion* excels here too, with ship design and combat proving yet further standout areas for the game. Admittedly, actual ship-to-ship battles can become samey after extended play, but the complexity of the underlying mechanics always keeps things interesting. See, the fact that your race is constantly discovering improved weapons, shields or other combat enhancements means you'll very often be customising a loadout on a new ship design, then eagerly waiting out a few turns, perhaps fiddling with the industry vs research vs ecology sliders to speed up its construction.

Another aspect of *Master Of Orion* that sees it remain a classic is the replayability. Its randomly generated galaxies could offer a bounty of resource-rich worlds to colonise, or a particular scenario might see only a scarce number of ideal worlds, which all the races vie over for control. Relations change from game to game, and the limited branches of the tech tree mean you'll end up taking different research paths each time around. There are multiple conditions for victory, and a near-endless number of resource management, colonisation and research routes to get there.

Master Of Orion's legacy as the benchmark space strategy title continues to this day. Even *Civilization*'s spiritual successor, *Alpha Centauri*, an excellent game in its own right, couldn't take over the top spot of the space-themed 4X-ers, despite having years in which to improve over its closest rival. Indeed, *Master Of Orion II: Battle At Antares*, now a good 14 years old, is still compared to every newcomer in the genre that has been released since. If you have not played *MOO* or its sequel, grab them today from **GOG.com**. You won't be sorry.

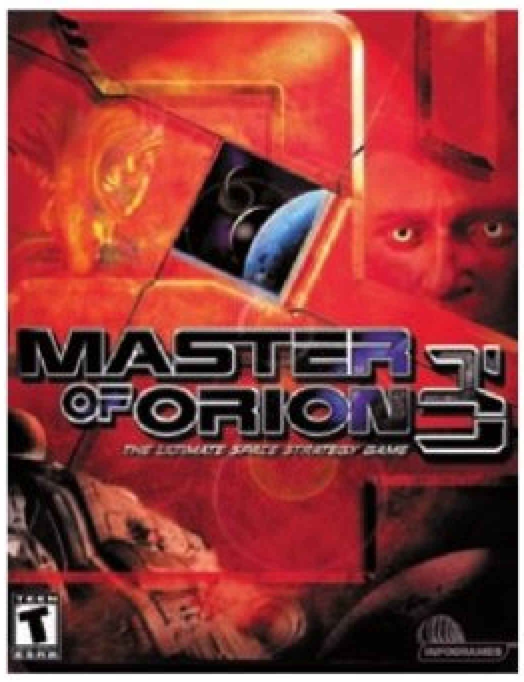
THE GOOD, THE BAD, AND THE FREE

The sequels of Master of Orion



Master Of Orion II

It's not always the case that sequels garner more praise than the originals, but MicroProse definitely knew what it was doing with its mid-Nineties strategy games. *Master Of Orion II: Battle At Antares* is regarded by many as better than the already-excellent original, and includes an improved user interface, additional diplomacy options, deeper strategic options all round, and, of course, three new playable races. Plus, *MOO II* boasted the option to create your own custom space-faring civilisation if you wanted to tweak and mould an alien race of your own. This is a truly excellent game, winning a well-deserved 1996 game of the year award, and should be sampled by any sci-fi-loving strategy fans.



Master Of Orion 3

MOO II was an outstanding sequel, but as for *Master Of Orion 3*… not so much. It was buggy, the AI had actually taken a step backwards, and some of the most interesting features of the previous games had been removed. A shame, considering what utter classics the first two were in the universe of space strategy gaming. The third outing was ultimately a huge disappointment, with the fact of the matter simply being that MicroProse and Simtex were the *Master Of Orion* kings. With the third and final game in the series coming from a new developer and publisher, it just didn't have the same magic that the original teams put in. Feel free to avoid this one.



FreeOrion

FreeOrion is not quite a sequel, but we thought we'd better mention it because it deserves its place in the *MOO* legacy. It's an open-source, freely downloadable collaborative project that re-creates the experience of *Master Of Orion*. Made by fans, it's got more of what the first two had, and less of what made the third game a flop. The interface is well put together, it lacks tedious micromanagement, the graphics do the job very well, and the soundtrack is moody and absolutely perfect for the genre. Although fully playable, it's still not considered complete, and new updates are released all the time. Head on over to **www.freeorion.org** to check it out, but be prepared to read the documentation to get the most out of it.



» Oliver on creating Coss: "Showing the Terminal Man in transition from human to computer without the aid of Photoshop in 1984 was a challenge. I chose to spray colours through a layer of nylon net curtain material, capturing its 'electronic' structure."



THE

Darran Jones speaks to **Oliver Frey** about his iconic videogame superhero

If you're a lifelong fan of *Crash* magazine, chances are you know who the Terminal Man is. You'll also know that he was created by Oliver Frey, the man who not only painstakingly drew all of Newsfield's stunning covers, but also illustrated the front of this month's Retro Gamer.

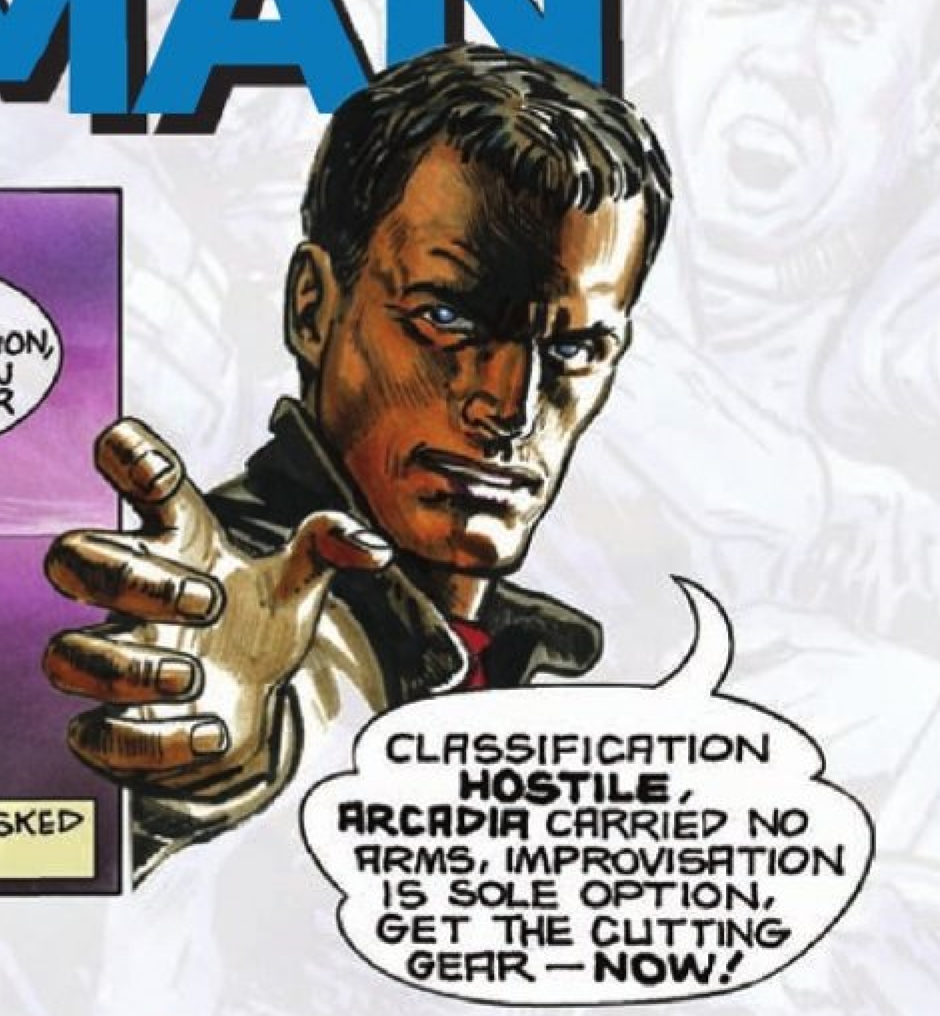
Sadly despite initial interest, *The Terminal Man*'s popularity eventually waned, and although a second story was started by both Frey and writer Kelvin Gosnell, it was never actually finished. Despite never knowing how that final adventure concluded, the popularity of *The Terminal Man* remains strong, with a recent compendium that contained all of the character's previous adventures selling out of its first print run.

Eager to find out more about the intriguing character, we spoke to Frey about his beloved creation and found out not only where *The Terminal Man* began, but where his adventures may head in the future.



TERMINAL MAN





» Oliver on creating heroes in motion: "I had fun depicting the effect of the moving surface by splitting the static landscape into three frames and showing the characters receding into the distance, which gives a very cinematic time-motion feel to the images."

Retro Gamer: Where did the idea for *The Terminal Man* originate?
Oliver Frey: Roger Kean and myself bounced around ideas that would combine computer games, science fiction and action, so what better than to combine all three into one character – literally. A hero we called Cross.

RG: So was the strip born because you genuinely felt that *Crash* needed a comic strip, or because you just wanted to return to creating comics?
OF: Well *Crash* was always conceived to appeal to young teenagers and to be an entertaining game players' read; a sort of 'lifestyle' magazine. I felt that including a comic strip – providing it was related to computers – would enhance the magazine's appeal. And yes, I wanted to do a comic that would actually be under my control for a change!

> **"We combined games, sci-fi and action into one character"**

RG: Did you have any particular idea in mind when you came up with *The Terminal Man*'s interesting art style?
OF: Not really. It was just a progression of the style I had developed when drawing the *Trigan Empire* strip for *Look And Learn* [children's magazine] in the Seventies, just less constrained by anyone else's expectations.

RG: How did the collaboration with the strip's writer, Kelvin Gosnell, come about?
OF: He was recommended to me by my then illustrators' agent because Kelvin had edited and written for the comic *2000 AD*. I contacted him and explained briefly the concept and he sounded quite excited at the prospect. We then had several meetings, both in London and up in Ludlow, and he went off to outline the 48 pages.

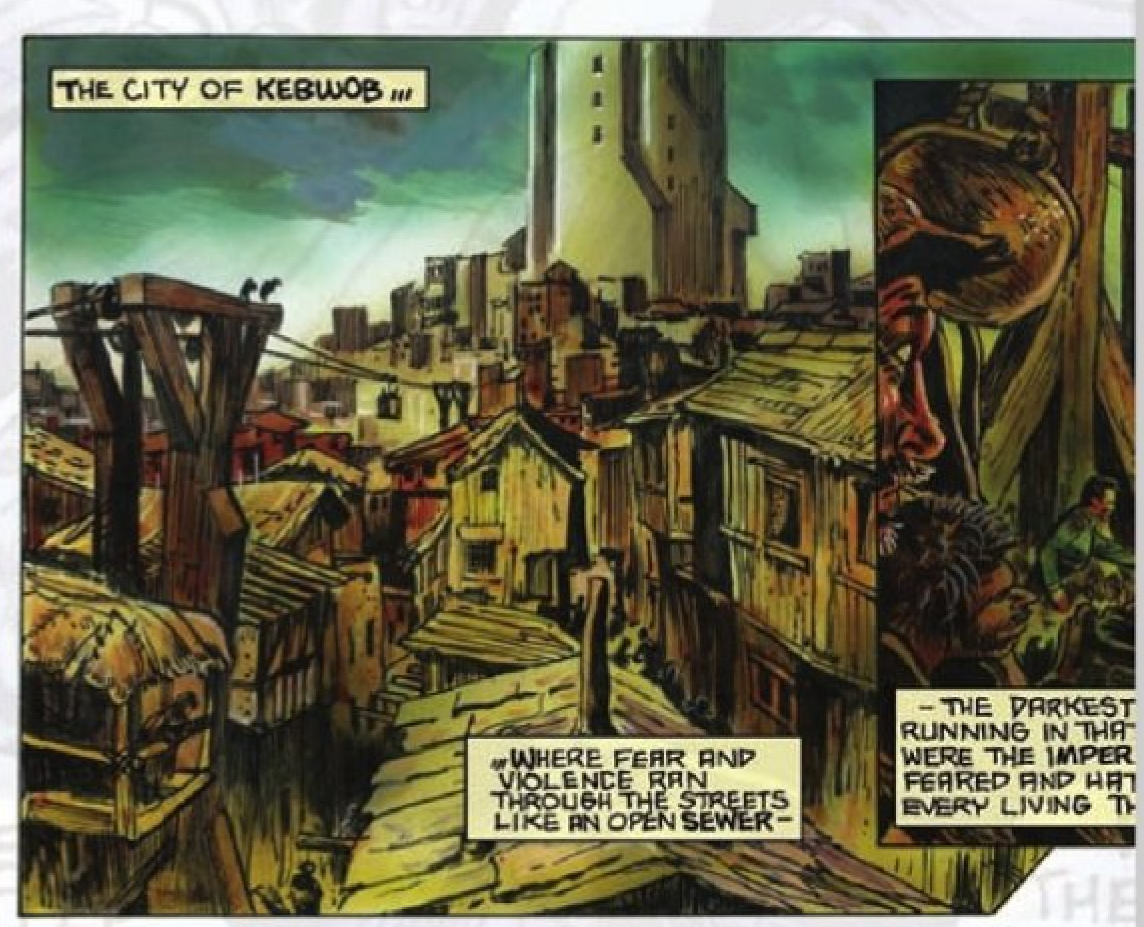
RG: Did you or *Crash* editor Roger Kean add your own ideas to the scripts?
OF: Not ideas as such – but I started breaking up suggested panels in Kelvin's script into multiples to enhance the 'movie' feel of the story. I did also change the end slightly to make it feel a little more epic, and to leave it open to a sequel. Roger was too busy with the editorial material for the first issue of *Crash* to have anything more than a critical role at the pencils stage, making a few suggestions as to the appearance of Cross.

RG: Did you come up with the characters or were all of them created by Gosnell?
OF: We had the general idea for Cross – the Terminal Man – but Kelvin fleshed out both the characters and plot. In fact, the name Cross was actually his idea – a cross between computer, virus and human.

RG: So how long would each story take to create?

» Oliver on infrared light: "I had to render the effect of a heat signature as seen through Cross's eyes with the airbrush and cut-paper mask – this would have been a doddle if I'd had a Mac!"









» Explosive take-off: "I spent hours painting the main picture – explosions and shattering structures being favourite subjects of mine. Imagine my reaction when I discovered the original was lost and I had to repaint the whole thing again for the *Terminal Man* book!"





» Oliver on static cinema: "I've always loved drawing furious action and capturing its dynamics in comic strip form. I added to the number of frames asked for in the script to produce the effect of violence and speed, and zig-zag shapes added to the effect."

OF: It was quite straightforward really. Each episode of four pages took me the equivalent of a week in total to draw, ink and letter.

RG: So how did you find the pressure of creating a monthly comic strip in addition to the covers for Newsfield's various mags?
OF: Well to start with, there was only *Crash* to cope with – a cover and numerous editorial illustrations. Come 1985, *Zzap!64* arrived and the pressure soon began to mount. Quite a few *Terminal Man* episodes ended up being completed in all-night sessions! Our advertisement manager at the time, John Edwards, lived in London, but came to Ludlow once a month to finalise advert placements, and if I didn't get finished by the time he returned to London to take the art boards to our repro house in Finsbury Park for scanning, it was a schedule disaster!

RG: Can you give us an insight into why *The Terminal Man 2* stopped when it did?
OF: When I decided to launch *Terminal Man 2*, I wrote the script myself, with only a vague idea of where it was headed, whereas his first outing had been fully scripted by Kelvin at the very outset. I soon found myself increasingly frazzled by the ever-tighter deadlines and had to reluctantly admit defeat or suffer a nervous breakdown. I admit I felt very unprofessional.

"With so many planets, the story could still be running today…"

Roger Kean: It was a hard battle to persuade Oli of the realities of the actual situation. At the time he started the second series we had *Amtix!* still on the go, *The Games Machine* was in early development and *LM* magazine, as well as his continual work on *Crash* and *Zzap!64*. It was all too much for him.

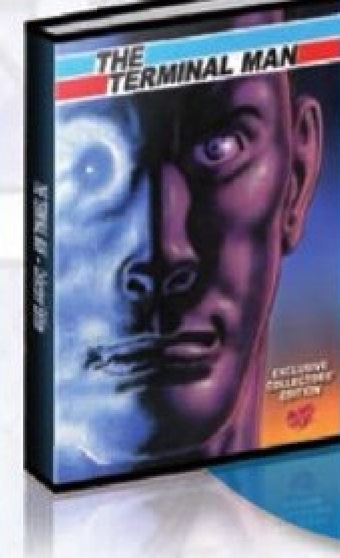
RG: In that case, would you like to possibly tell us how the story might have ended?
OF: *The Terminal Man* would contend with whoever was controlling the station that was holding that section of the Dyson sphere aligned, leaving him to start further adventures on the many planets within it. With so many planets in the sphere, the story could still be running today…

RG: Have you ever spoken to Gosnell about finishing the story? What are his thoughts?
OF: Well, because I was writing the story, this never came up. Unfortunately, I have lost contact with him and have not been able to locate him via the internet – it's as if he's vanished! The last mention I can find on the internet is an entry as author of a strip in 1987. If anyone knows what happened to Kelvin after that, I'd be pleased to hear.

RG: The first run of your new *Terminal Man* book has just sold out. Would you ever consider reprinting it for others to discover?
OF: We are doing the costings now so that we can put something up on my website very soon. As it's a print on demand job, we can print as few or as many as needed, but with the costs of printing, packing and posting, it's necessary to have a reasonable idea of potential future sales to ensure that it's not going to make a loss.

RG: How about returning to illustrating comic books? Surely you've considered it?
OF: If offers were forthcoming then I'd certainly consider it. I also have some ideas for graphic novels that are bouncing around. We'll see.

RG: Finally, why do you think *The Terminal Man* was so popular with *Crash*'s readers?
OF: He was just a really good character: strange but dependable, and totally linked to computers and gaming. The story was action-packed, and because it ran for 12 episodes, also interestingly convoluted; many stories in comics then had been reduced to being very short and therefore simple because it was felt that the readers' attention span was small – a big error!



The Terminal Man is once again in stock and is available to buy from **oliverfrey art.com** and **imagineshop.com** for just £18.95 (+ P&P)



The Untouchables

THE UNTOUCHING TALE ABOUT ONE MAN'S BATTLE WITH ALCOHOL

» RETROREVIVAL



» SPECTRUM
» OCEAN
» 1989

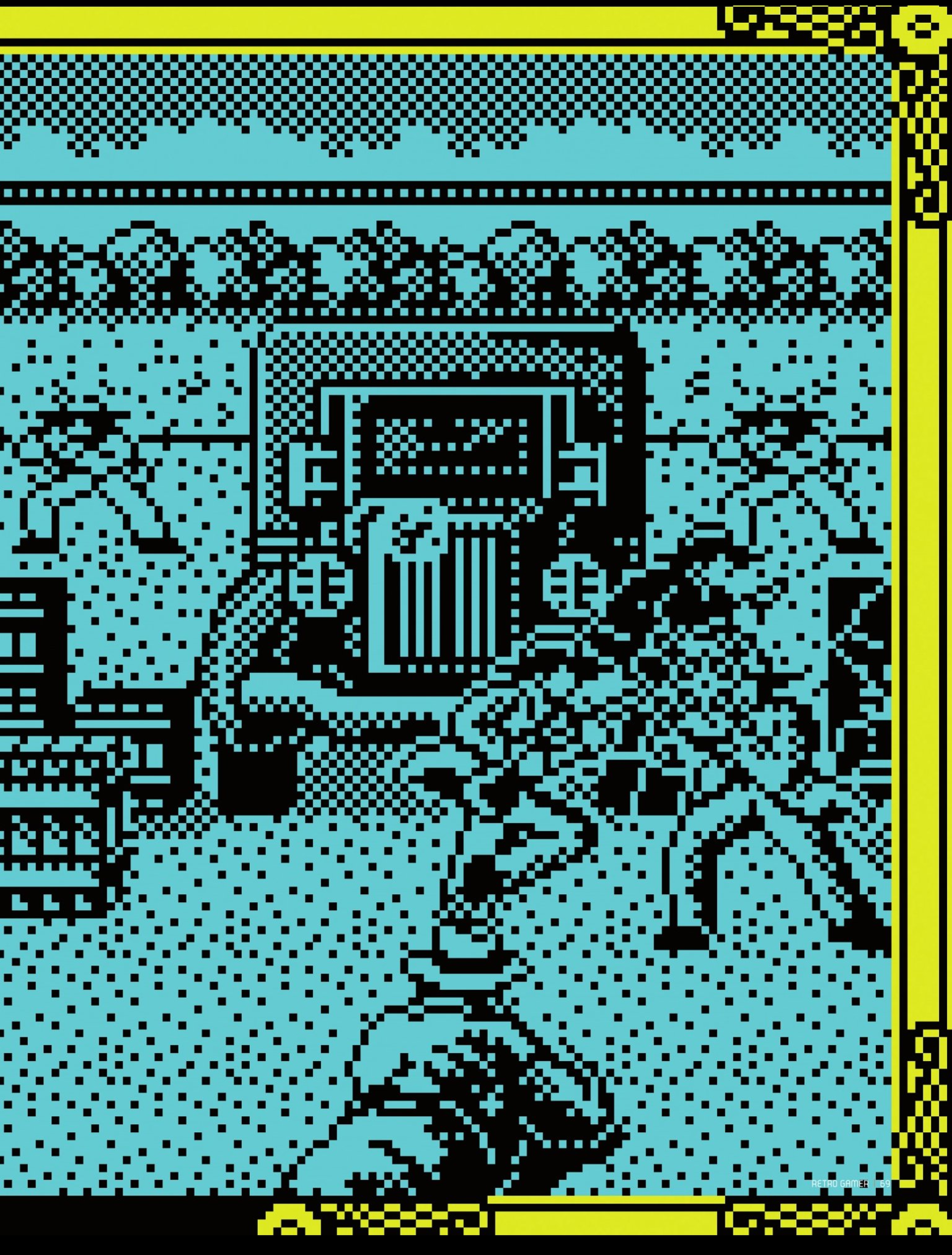
Ocean was renowned for delivering decent movie adaptations, and *The Untouchables* is one of the Mancunian software house's best offerings. One of a handful of quality games to have been worked on by programmer and co-founder of Ocean Software, Jon Woods, *The Untouchables* was a multifaceted action gem, comprising of six levels all based on memorable scenes from the film.

Set in Prohibition-era America, the notorious mob boss Al Capone is illegally supplying liquor to the outwardly sober city of Chicago, and his illegal drinks enterprise is aided by him having most of the city, as well as its corrupt police department, tucked nicely inside his tailored suit pocket.

Following the plot of the movie closely, you assume the role of federal agent and full-time teetotaller Eliot Ness, who has a real bee in his bonnet about people consuming alcoholic drinks. In fact, so unwavering is he about making Chicago an alcohol-free zone he does what any normal person in his situation would do: pulls together a crack team of two police officers and an accountant, then arms them with guns and carte blanche to expose Capone's illegal dealings and bring the feared gangster kingpin to justice.

So that's the crux of the story explained; what about the game? Well, *The Untouchables* is split into six levels, and all try to do something a little bit different. One minute you're participating in a daring warehouse raid, tasked with trying to retrieve evidence from ten accountants that all strangely seem to be convening at one place, the next you're rolling around on the floor blasting beer kegs and mobsters in a cool *Operation Wolf*-style level. But arguably the standout level has to be Ocean's great re-creation of the memorable railway station shootout in the movie, a tense scene in which a baby in a pram gets caught up in the crossfire between Eliot Ness and Capone's men.

Whether you're a fan of the movie of not, *The Untouchables* has more than its share of enjoyable gameplay and cool moments to appease action fans. It's another untouchable effort from Ocean. *



retro GAMER's

Greatest Adventure Games that weren't by LucasArts...

As much as we love the graphic adventures of LucasArts, every single one of them, from Maniac Mansion to Escape From Monkey Island, is of such high quality that they would dominate any adventure list to the point where they exclude so many other games that are worth playing. With that in mind, here's our rundown of all the point-and-click classics that you should play after finishing with the SCUMM library





SIMON THE SORCERER

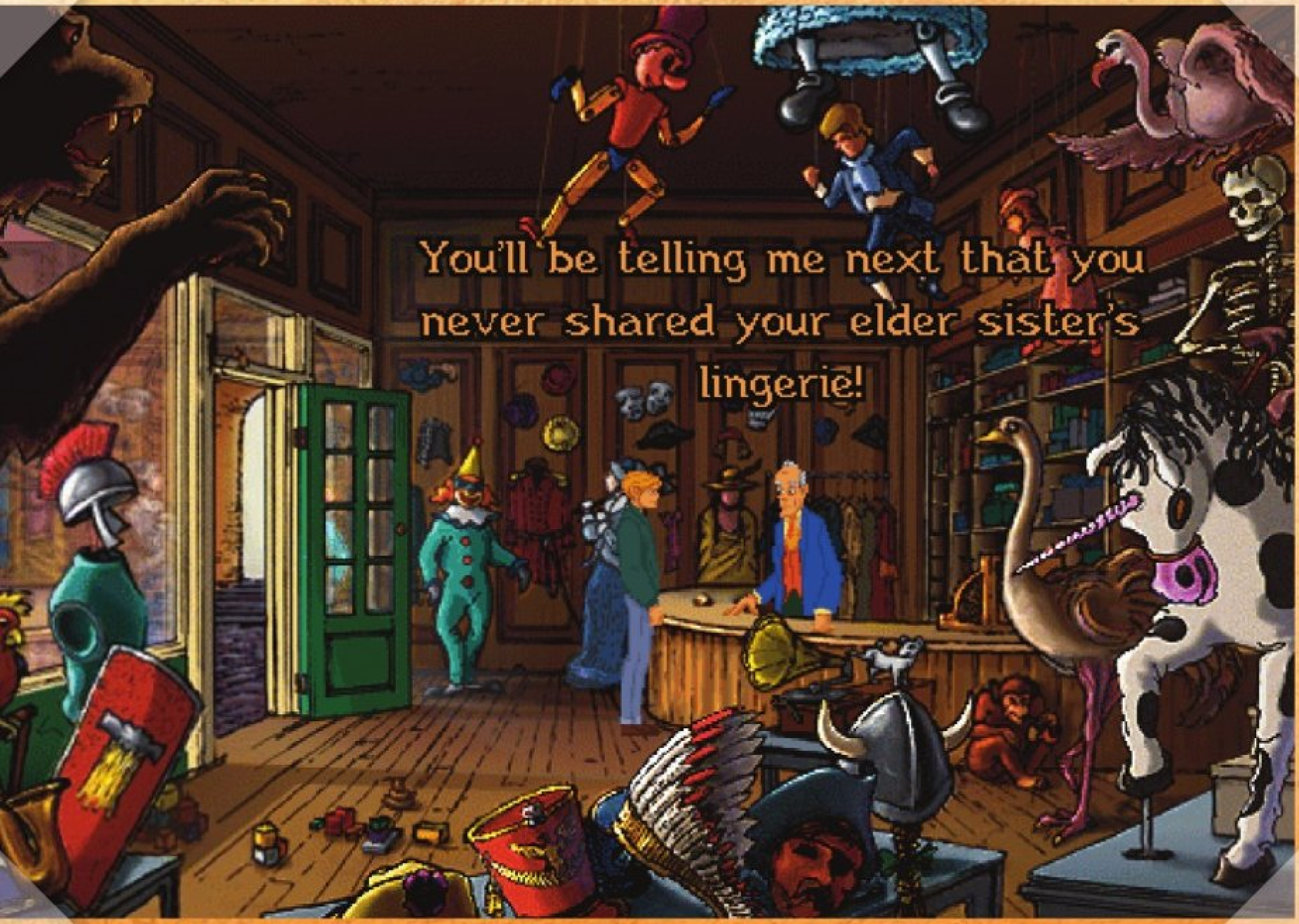
Format: Amiga, CD32, Archimedes, PC, iPhone
Year: 1993
Publisher: Adventure Soft
Developer: In-house

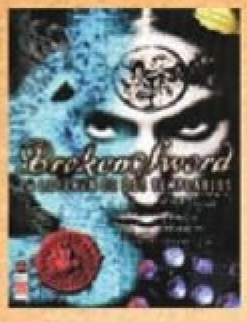
Simon The Sorcerer is generally considered to be the British answer to *Monkey Island*, and although it replicated the LucasArts style perfectly, it was the very British sense of humour that gave it its own personality. The clever pastiche of traditional fairytales, spliced with references to popular culture, made the adventure one of the funniest games of the Nineties, and it became even funnier in 1994 when Chris Barrie (*Red Dwarf*) lent his voice to the CD-ROM re-release. 17 years later, the game still holds up well, with some tough puzzles and witty dialogue, though a few empty screens drag it out – a problem that was rectified in the equally good sequel. The less said about parts 3-5, however, the better.











BROKEN SWORD: THE SHADOW OF THE TEMPLARS

Format: PC, PlayStation, GBA
Year: 1996
Publisher: Virgin Interactive
Developer: Revolution Software

From its incredible opening, in which a clown blows up a Parisian cafe, *Broken Sword* proved to be a different sort of adventure. It still did comedy and puzzles as well as anything else, but it also demonstrated a flair for cinematic storytelling, likeable characters and a riveting plot. Charles Cecil's well-researched script, loosely inspired by the 1982 book *The Holy Blood And The Holy Grail*, turned religious conspiracy theory into a clever and enjoyable adventure long before Dan Brown made millions with *The Da Vinci Code*, and, ironically enough, Cecil later found himself contributing to a *Da Vinci Code* game due to his expertise. *Broken Sword* remains the superior game, of course, even with the infuriating goat puzzle that was removed from the 2009 director's cut.

retro GAMER's

Greatest Adventure Games that weren't by LucasArts

BENEATH A STEEL SKY



Format: Amiga, CD32, PC, iPhone
Year: 1994
Publisher: Virgin Interactive
Developer: Revolution Software

Though another Charles Cecil creation, *Beneath A Steel Sky* couldn't be more different to *Broken Sword*. Set in a dystopian, industrial future, dominated by depressing high-rise complexes, it shouldn't surprise you to hear that *Steel Sky* was developed while Revolution was still based in Hull. The cyberpunk stylings, helped by design work from Dave Gibbons (*2000 AD*, *Watchmen*), gave the game a unique feel within a genre obsessed with comedy. Throughout the adventure, the player is accompanied by a robotic companion named Joey, who can be used to solve puzzles and upgraded with spare parts. Despite producing three *Broken Sword* sequels, Cecil has sadly never created a follow-up to *Steel Sky* but has recently dropped a few hints that he intends to collaborate with Gibbons again in the future.





STAR TREK: 25TH ANNIVERSARY



Format: Amiga, PC, Mac
Year: 1992
Publisher: Interplay
Developer: In-house

Star Trek's silver anniversary, which actually passed in 1990, was celebrated in a number of ways, but it's this little-known adventure that we're most fond of. There's a startlingly authentic feel thanks to the appearance of the original cast, as well as sound effects and visual design that demonstrate a meticulous attention to detail. Interplay's adventure rather bravely incorporates combat elements – phasers can be used as items to solve puzzles in a rather deadly manner – but the inclusion actually works quite well, faithfully sticking to the lore of *Star Trek* without unbalancing the gameplay. Furthermore, an innovative episodic structure allowed the developers to tell several stories within one game, much like a series of the TV show, arguably influencing the episodic adventures of today.

BLADE RUNNER



Format: PC
Year: 1997
Publisher: Virgin Interactive
Developer: Westwood Studios

Created by a studio better known for its real-time strategy games like *Dune II* and *Command & Conquer*, *Blade Runner* is one of the few examples of a real-time adventure game – as the player moves around the game world, the NPCs do the same thing, meaning that the player must carefully choose where and when to act. Choice is a huge part of the game, actually. There are multiple decisions open to the player at certain points, which can lead to one of 13 different endings to the story – another unusual feature. Released 15 years after the film on which it is based, *Blade Runner* lacked the input of Harrison Ford, so Westwood decided to use a new character and new story that ran concurrently with the plot of the film – a smart move that freed up the writers and offered fans a virtual sequel in interactive form.



From The Forum

"Probably *Space Quest III*. Really the best of the *Space Quest* games that felt so open. Great locations, funny characters and loads of brilliant bits."
theantmeister

"All I know is *Sanitarium* better be in that article."
Freestyler

"*Flight Of The Amazon Queen*. Reminded LucasArts that they weren't the only company out there who could create humorous, well thought out graphic adventures."
paranoid marvin

"*Beneath A Steel Sky* and *Lure Of The Temptress*. Great games from Revolution Studios."
Katzkatz

"*Prisoner Of Ice*. HP Lovecraft-inspired genius. Fantastic subject material, Very atmospheric game. I'd love to see it given the HD treatment and appear on XBLA or PSN."
thevulture

"The *Police Quest* and *Leisure Suit Larry* series rank pretty high – in fact higher than some of the LucasArts games. *Beneath A Steel Sky* and *Broken Sword* are pretty damn good, and I also loved *Kyrandia*. Someone mentioned *Dreamweb*, and I absolutely love that one as well. I've completed it several times since it came out. *The Longest Journey* is fantastic too."
StarEye

"*Syberia*. Such a beautiful game and pretty challenging."
hedgehog

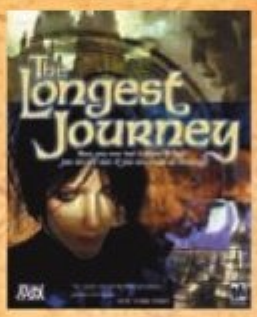
"*Operation Stealth*. One of Delphine's best."
Antiriad2097

"It has to be *Blade Runner*. Beautifully crafted, great use of the tools of the trade, and an atmosphere lifted straight from the film. The lead character wasn't Rick Deckard, which was nice as it allowed the story to subtly deviate from the film, giving the game a fresh feel. I'd love to play this again sometime."
Mire Mare

"*Beneath A Steel Sky*… *Simon The Sorcerer*… and *Myst*. Okay, I'm taking the piss about the last one"
Rapidmollusc

"*Gabriel Knight: Sins Of The Fathers*. So creepy, and I played it before I had a CD-ROM, so I can't comment on Mark Hamill's voice work – but I suspect this was a blessing! I think it managed to pull off the serious adventure vibe without taking itself too seriously."
mrandi





THE LONGEST JOURNEY

Format: PC
Year: 2000
Publisher: Empire Interactive
Developer: Funcom

The modern age of adventure games, dominated by niche European PC developers, has drifted far from the comedy cartoon adventures of old toward a more realistic, more mature style. For the most part, these new adventures are crushingly dull, but if there's one modern, mature adventure that shrugs off this reputation then it's *The Longest Journey*. Taking place between two parallel worlds – the medieval, magic-driven world of Arcadia and the futuristic, technology-led Stark – it stars April Ryan, a girl who discovers that she can shift between the two. April's journey takes her from the relative comfort of Stark into the chaotic, warring realm of Arcadia, and thrusts her into a conflict that changes her life completely. Without spoiling the plot too much, all we'll say is that April's adventure is one of the most gripping and adult tales in gaming and absolutely must be played. The puzzles, on the other hand – some of the hardest ever committed to CD-ROM – do the game few favours. But it's worth persevering through them to experience this unique story.



SANITARIUM

Format: PC
Year: 1998
Publisher: ASC Games
Developer: DreamForge Intertainment

The top-down perspective has more in common with a PC RPG than a traditional point-and-click adventure game, and that should give you some clue that *Sanitarium* is far from a typical example of the genre. Though puzzles are present and entertaining enough, it's the story and dialogue that makes the game so good. In it you play as Max Laughton, an amnesiac who wakes from a car crash to find himself trapped in a desolate, disturbing and ancient sanitarium. As he works to unravel the mystery of how he got there and who he really is, the game shifts between the brutal fantasy world and Max's own delusional subconscious, often blurring the line between the two, to the point where the player can never really trust what's going on in the world. One of the most graphically horrifying and psychologically disturbing games ever produced, *Sanitarium* was criminally overlooked when first released. Thankfully it's now available and playable on modern systems via Good Old Games, so there's no excuse not to give it a second chance.



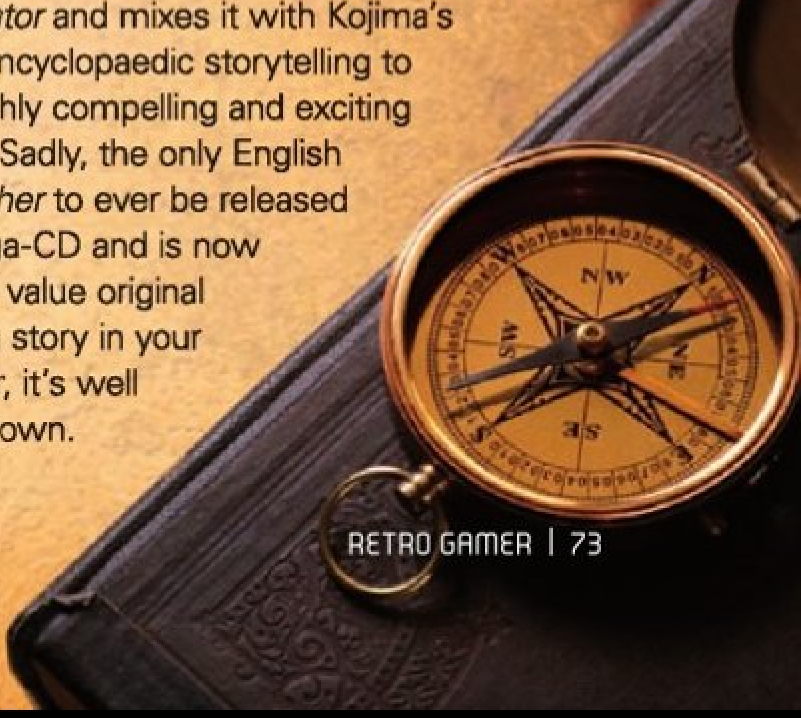


SNATCHER

Format: MSX2, PC-88, PC-Engine, PlayStation, Saturn, Mega-CD
Year: 1988
Publisher: Konami
Developer: In-house

While the point-and-click genre is mostly dominated by Western developers, the Japanese are also known for creating adventure games. Hideo Kojima's *Snatcher* is fairly typical of the style – first-person perspective, story-focused and leaning more toward clue-finding and dialogue navigation than inventory puzzles – and it also happens to be the single greatest adventure that Japan has ever produced. Set in a dystopian future version of Japan, it takes influence from *Blade Runner* and *The Terminator* and mixes it with Kojima's flair for dense, encyclopaedic storytelling to create a thoroughly compelling and exciting interactive yarn. Sadly, the only English version of *Snatcher* to ever be released was on the Mega-CD and is now quite rare. If you value original ideas and strong story in your games, however, it's well worth tracking down.





Modern Classics

While the golden age of adventure games undoubtedly lies in the early Nineties, the past five years have seen a renaissance for the genre, thanks largely to the efforts of Telltale Games, a studio of ex-LucasArts staff who have reinvented the genre in episodic, downloadable format. As such, here are five essential adventures from the last few years. They're not retro, but they're still worth playing.



MACHINARIUM

Amanita Design, 2009

The tale of a robot who finds himself on the scrap heap and must work his way through a world of depressing industrial machinery to save his girlfriend, *Machinarium* is unusual in that it features no dialogue whatsoever. But it does have some of the best animation we've seen in a 2D game and some fun puzzles that are more about playing around with the world than combining items in obscure ways. Creator Amanita Design (*Samorost*) is definitely one to watch.



STRONG BAD'S COOL GAME FOR ATTRACTIVE PEOPLE

Telltale Games, 2008

Of all Telltale's episodic adventures, this is perhaps the most bizarre. You play a diminutive lucha libre obsessive with a severe case of self-delusion as he gets himself caught up in all kinds of mischief. Each episode features a playable Atari 2600 game, and the final episode sees Strong Bad caught inside a retro adventure game that's an awful lot like the original *King's Quest*.

Retro Gamer's Greatest Adventure Games that weren't by LucasArts







POLICENAUTS

Format: PC-98, 3DO, PlayStation, Saturn
Year: 1994
Publisher: Konami
Developer: In-house

Kojima's second adventure game isn't quite a sequel to *Snatcher*, but it is a spiritual successor with similar gameplay and themes. Also set in the future, it tells the tale of a private eye on Earth who is compelled to investigate a case of police corruption and drug trafficking on a space station near the moon after his ex-wife is murdered and her new husband reported missing. As with Kojima's other games, the developer wears his cinematic influences on his sleeve and, in this case, it's the unlikely mix of *Lethal Weapon* and sci-fi elements that we're treated to. The game is funnier than *Snatcher* as a result, but it's also equally compelling, Kojima demonstrating an ability to write dramatic stories in ways that he seems to have lost in the more recent and convoluted *Metal Gear* games.

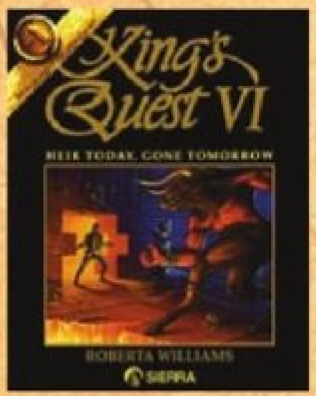


THE BEAST WITHIN: A GABRIEL KNIGHT MYSTERY

Format: PC
Year: 1995
Publisher: Sierra
Developer: In-house

The *Gabriel Knight* series, part historical fantasy yarn, part love story, is a series best taken as a whole thanks to the way that creator Jane Jensen expertly tells its story across three breathtaking chapters, but, despite this, it's also a rather fractured trilogy. Each one uses a different art style, starting with traditional pixels and moving to full polygon 3D, and threatens to unravel its own integrity as a result. If we had to recommend just one of the games, however, we'd go with this second instalment, purely because it's one of the only games ever to use full-motion video and digitised actors without reducing itself to a laughing stock. With $4 million of development costs behind it, *The Beast Within* is surely one of the most expensive adventure games of the Nineties, but you can feel every dollar right there on the screen and in the script, voice acting and game design.







KING'S QUEST VI: HEIR TODAY, GONE TOMORROW

Format: PC, Mac, Amiga
Year: 1992
Publisher: Sierra
Developer: In-house

Despite being Sierra's flagship franchise, the *King's Quest* series took years to hit its stride. Debuting in 1984, it featured awful EGA graphics, cumbersome text-adventure-style commands and frustrating timed puzzles and death scenes. We accepted it as the norm at the time, but when Ron Gilbert's *Maniac Mansion* arrived three years later, it showed that there were much better ways to make a graphic adventure. It took years for Sierra to catch up, but when it did the results were spectacular. Series creator Roberta Williams teamed up with a young Jane Jensen to write *King's Quest VI* and produced the single best game in the series, with puzzles and story equally matched in quality, an intuitive point-and-click interface, beautiful visuals, the first voice acting in the series, and multiple routes through the narrative. The *King's Quest* series continued for another two instalments and one officially approved fan sequel after this, but it never quite reached the same heights again.



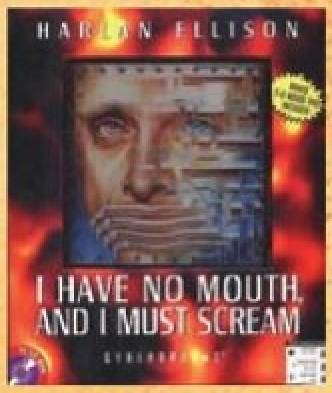
LEISURE SUIT LARRY: LOVE FOR SAIL!

Format: PC
Year: 1996
Publisher: Sierra
Developer: In-house

Creator Al Lowe tells us that *Leisure Suit Larry 7* – actually the sixth in the series – was his best and funniest work, and who are we to disagree with him? You can tell from the cartoon-like screenshots alone that this is a game of rare quality, even now. The humour, as ever, is an acquired taste. If character names like Dewmi Moore do nothing for you then you probably still won't get anything out of *Love For Sail*, but everyone else will find that it tickles that one particular funny bone that can't help giggling at every bit of innuendo it brushes against. And despite the silliness, this is ironically also Al Lowe's most mature game design, dispensing with Sierra's cursed death scenes and decisions that lead to unwinnable game states. In *Love For Sail*, the *Larry* series finally grew up – a triumph equalled only by the fact that the next two games, made without Lowe's involvement, abandoned the adventure gameplay, fumbled the humour and alienated every single one of Larry's existing fans.



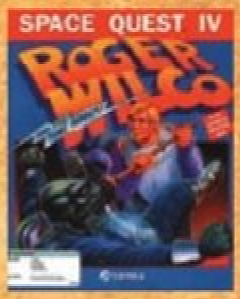




I HAVE NO MOUTH, AND I MUST SCREAM

Format: PC, Mac
Year: 1995
Publisher: Cyberdreams
Developer: The Dreamers Guild

Based on the short story by Harlan Ellison, *I Have No Mouth, And I Must Scream* tells the story of five people who have been trapped and tortured by a sentient computer for the past 109 years. The machine, named AM, constructs a set of virtual morality plays to test the values and worthiness of these five characters. Each is forced to make difficult ethical decisions on subjects like genocide, rape and insanity, and will often have to choose between doing the right thing and doing something terrible that helps thwart AM. As such, *I Have No Mouth, And I Must Scream* sidesteps the usual inventory puzzle dynamic and delivers something altogether more thought-provoking and mature. It remains a unique adventure, and because it was co-designed by Ellison himself, it stands as an example of the innovations that can be made when other types of artist get involved with videogames.



SPACE QUEST IV: ROGER WILCO AND THE TIME RIPPERS

Format: PC, Mac, Amiga, PC-98
Year: 1991
Publisher: Sierra
Developer: In-house

A huge leap forward for Sierra's sci-fi adventure series, *Space Quest IV* thrust players into a brave new world of point-and-click gameplay, VGA graphics and full voice acting. These huge technical advancements caught designers Mark Crowe and Scott Murphy in a reflective mood, and they took the opportunity to rather cleverly take the hero, Roger Wilco, on a time-travelling journey not through the years but through past and future instalments of the *Space Quest* series. Fabricated sequels *Space Quest X: Latex Babes Of Estros* and *Space Quest XII: Vohaul's Revenge II* are both visited during the adventure, as is the original *Space Quest*, complete with period EGA graphics and characters who are offended by Wilco's 256-colour sprite. And then there's the narration that takes every possible opportunity to openly mock the hero every time he gets in a pickle. It's a clever premise that could only have been realised with the sudden advance of technology, but *Space Quest IV* doesn't move forward in every single respect. Obtuse puzzles and unclear signposting epitomise everything that was wrong with Sierra's earlier adventures, and *Space Quest* wouldn't get over these flaws until its fifth instalment, but *Space Quest IV* is the most charming and imaginative by far.



Modern Classics



A VAMPYRE STORY

Autumn Moon Entertainment, 2008

The first game from the studio of Bill Tiller, best known as the artist who transformed the world of Guybrush Threepwood into a cartoon vision in *The Curse Of Monkey Island*. As such, *A Vampyre Story* is one of the best-looking adventures of the modern age, but it's no slouch in other departments. The story and dialogue are funny, if a little long-winded, while the puzzles are imaginative, thanks to the way they're solved by the lead character's vampiric powers.



PHOENIX WRIGHT: ACE ATTORNEY

Capcom, 2005

First released in Japan for the GBA in 2001, *Phoenix Wright* was an unknown quantity until it came to the DS and blew us all away with its originality. The first-person gameplay recalls other Japanese adventures like *Snatcher*, but it's the courtroom scenes at the end of each chapter that make the *Ace Attorney* series so compelling. The dramatic to-and-fro between lawyer and witness is a thrill totally unique to Capcom's cult hit.

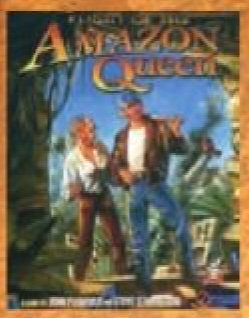


STILL LIFE

Microids, 2005

Still Life looks boring but is saved by one of the most riveting narratives in modern gaming. It focuses on FBI agent Vic McPherson as she tracks a killer using all the gadgets at her disposal, but the game also regularly flashes back to the Twenties where you play Vic's grandfather Gus as he works on a very similar case, except with more traditional methods. Both stories run parallel until the game climaxes into a stunningly tense ending.

Retro Gamer's Greatest Adventure Games that weren't by LucasArts



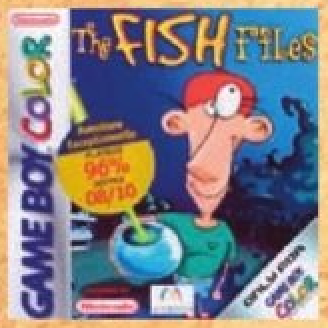
FLIGHT OF THE AMAZON QUEEN

Format: PC, Amiga, iPhone
Year: 1995
Publisher: Renegade Software
Developer: Interactive Binary Illusions

Though there are no LucasArts games in this list, there are a couple that are so close to that style that they might as well have Ron Gilbert's name plastered across the box. *Simon The Sorcerer* is one and *Flight Of The Amazon Queen* is the other. Transparently inspired by *Indiana Jones*, the game captures the jet-setting adventure and macho humour almost identically. It does lack the style and sophistication of Lucas's own *Indy* games, but the jokes are funny enough and the puzzles strike exactly the right balance between accessibility and challenge. It's not the sort of game that can be encapsulated by a unique selling point or an innovative gameplay feature, but there's something warm and comfortable about its traditional stylings.



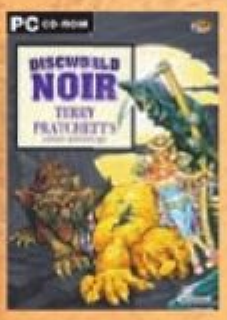




THE FISH FILES

Format: Game Boy Color
Year: 2001
Publisher: Microids
Developer: 7th Sense

Most great adventure games are made for a home computer of some sort, with the exception of certain conversions to CD-based systems, which makes *The Fish Files* a rather strange anomaly. It's exclusive to the Game Boy Color, the most unlikely of places to find a graphic adventure game. Miraculously, however, *The Fish Files* holds up very well on Nintendo's little 8-bit beauty. The visuals have a cartoon quality that outclasses most PC games of the Nineties, let alone anything else on the Game Boy, while the gameplay sticks so close to the classic LucasArts style that it's hard to believe that George didn't sue. The only thing that lets *The Fish Files* down is its inexplicable need to spoof *The X-Files*, a cultural touchstone that felt just as outdated in 2001 as it does in 2010.



DISCWORLD NOIR

Format: PC, PlayStation
Year: 1999
Publisher: Infogrames
Developer: Perfect Entertainment

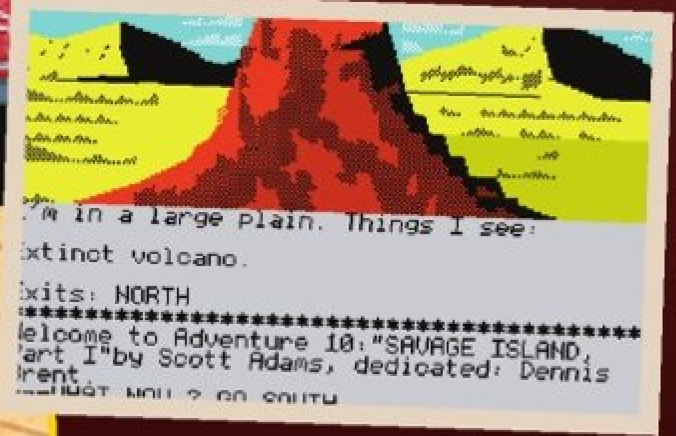
The first two *Discworld* games are also graphic adventures, and very good ones too. But as 2D point-and-click adventures starring a wizard and a big dollop of British humour, they're a little too similar to the superior *Simon The Sorcerer*. *Discworld Noir*, on the other hand, is an equally good game but with much more original gameplay. The film noir stylings may draw comparisons with LucasArts' *Grim Fandango*, but this is a different sort of game, eschewing inventory puzzles in favour of clue-finding and finger-pointing sequences that perfectly suit the dark detective narrative. As Lewton, Discworld's first and only private eye, you collect and save clues only to recall them later to use on suspects and witnesses. It's this mechanic that elevates *Discworld Noir* above its predecessors.



Expert Opinions



SIMON WOODROFFE
(Simon The Sorcerer, The Feeble Files)
"Since it's retro I assume we want to avoid *Phoenix Wright* and *Layton*. I'll go with *Toonstruck* because it made me laugh – the plot was just pure ridiculous fun and the voice acting was first class. That visual style was incredible at the time as well."



TIM SCHAFER
(Full Throttle, Grim Fandango)
"by Infocom or *Savage Island* by Scott Adams." [This is Tim's rather confusing response in full. Serves us right for asking him on Twitter, I suppose – Ed]



RON GILBERT
(Maniac Mansion, The Secret Of Monkey Island)
"Wait! There are non-LucasArts adventure games? My favourite has to be the early *Leisure Suit Larry* games. He was fun in this perfectly sophomoric way and Al Lowe is a funny guy."



AL LOWE
(Leisure Suit Larry, Freddy Pharkas)
"I guess I'd have to say the *Gabriel Knight* games by Jane Jensen. Each was good so I can't eliminate any. But personally, I was also proud of *Leisure Suit Larry 7: Love For Sail*. I thought by that game, I had finally learned how to design a good game. And then there were none."



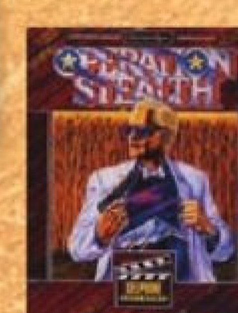
CRUISE FOR A CORPSE

Format: PC, Amiga, Atari ST
Year: 1991
Publisher: US Gold
Developer: Delphine Software

Made by the same studio behind incredible works like *Another World* and *Flashback*, *Cruise For A Corpse* may be a different sort of game but it displays the same commitment to originality and beauty. The adventure gameplay is a bit light, to say the least, but that's hardly the point. *Cruise For A Corpse* is all about the *Poirot*-style yarn, the immersive Twenties aesthetic and those incredible vector visuals, somewhere between animated cels and polygons, that only Delphine seemed to do so well. The developer labelled its style as 'Cinematique' – a rather apt term that perfectly captures the very French look and filmic techniques that make *Cruise For A Corpse* as much a visual storytelling experience as it is a game. And in the adventure genre, that is great praise indeed.



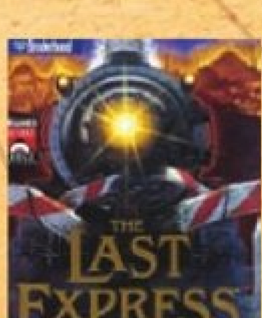




OPERATION STEALTH

Format: PC, Amiga, Atari ST
Year: 1990
Publisher: US Gold
Developer: Delphine Software

Released as *James Bond: The Stealth Affair* in the US, *Operation Stealth* is essentially the same game except with a few inconsequential references removed. Or, more accurately, *The Stealth Affair* is the same game as *Operation Stealth* but with the *Bond* references added, since the game was first published in Europe. Another adventure from Delphine, this one is a more traditional game in terms of visuals, looking more like something Sierra would have produced, but is notable for other reasons, such as the ability to play around with gadgets. Sadly, as a game with the word 'stealth' in the title, *Operation Stealth* inevitably features a few overhead sections where you have to avoid patrolling guards – a mistake that even LucasArts made with *Indiana Jones And The Fate Of Atlantis* two years later.



THE LAST EXPRESS

Format: PC, Mac
Year: 1997
Publisher: Brøderbund
Developer: Smoking Car Productions

In between developing *Prince Of Persia 2* in 1993 and *The Sands Of Time* in 2003, Jordan Mechner did two things of note: he produced a short documentary that would ultimately lead to his move into Hollywood, and he also put that talent to use in the development of *The Last Express*, a rare deviation from platform games. Mechner called upon the animation technique of rotoscoping, used in the first *Prince Of Persia* but on a much grander scale here, which lent it a luxurious feel that has aged much better than the murky 3D PC games of the era. The greatest thing about *The Last Express*, however, is its structure: the game's real-time flow moves the story along around the player, making it impossible to see everything in a single playthrough and ensuring that several endings are made possible.



Future Classic



Modern games you'll still be playing in years to come

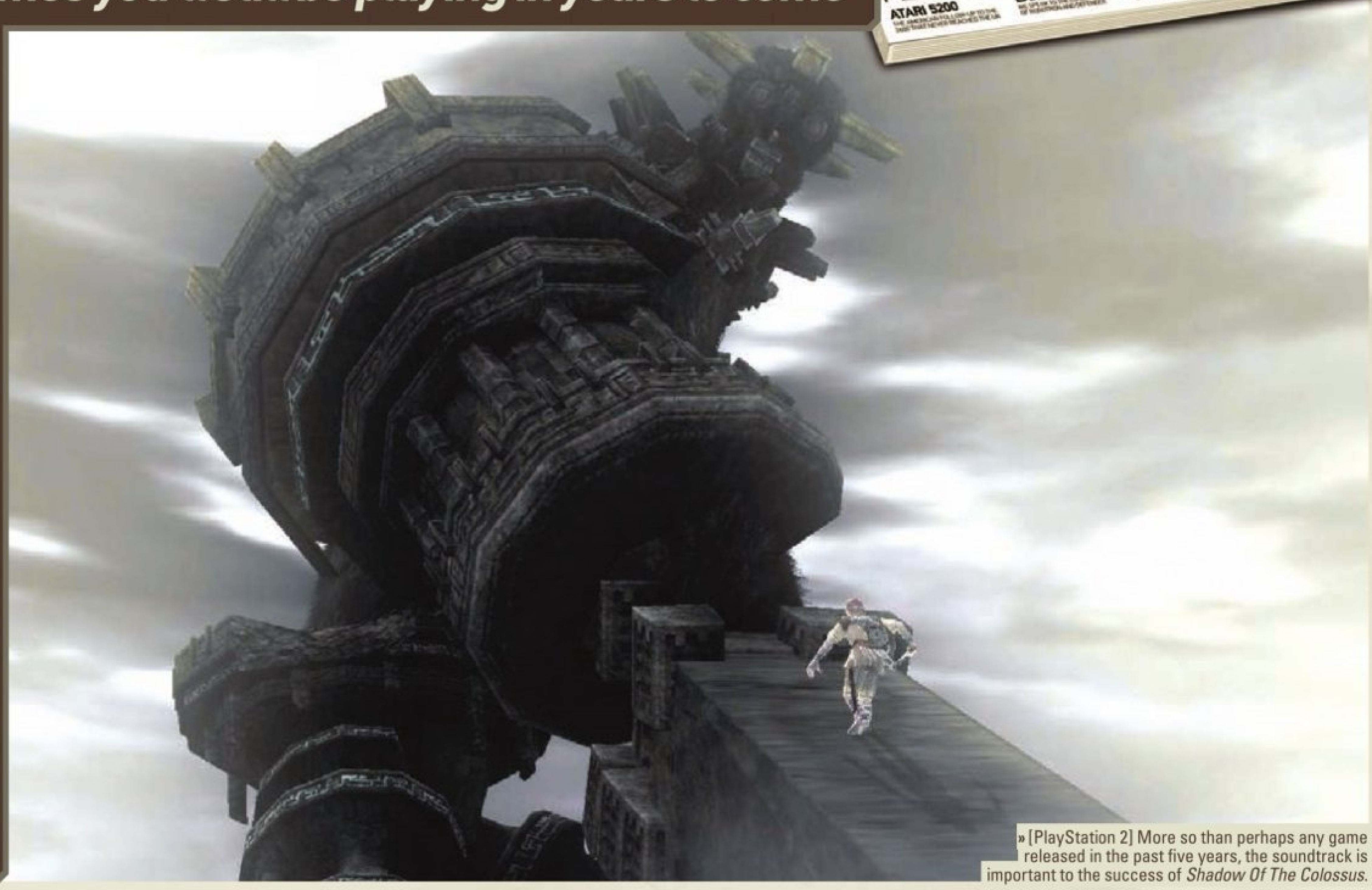


INFO

- **» Featured System:** PlayStation 2
- **» Year Released:** 2006
- **» Publisher:** Sony
- **» Developer:** SCEJ/Team Ico
- **» Key People:** Fumito Ueda (Game Design) Kenji Kaido (Producer) Kow Otani (Music)
- **» Buy it for:** £20+

GO DEEPER

- **» Members of the dev team went out and rode horses to get a feel for it, before animating Agro.**
- **» Beta footage of the game showed Colossi that didn't make the final cut, such as a spider creature.**



» [PlayStation 2] More so than perhaps any game released in the past five years, the soundtrack is important to the success of *Shadow Of The Colossus*.

04. SHADOW OF THE COLOSSUS

Frequently cited as evidence of games' evolution into an art form, Shadow Of The Colossus was one of the most evocative and technologically impressive titles to hit the PS2

THE BACKGROUND

Like *Ico* before it, which started life on the PSone before mercifully jumping platforms, *Shadow Of The Colossus* spent a long time in the conceptual stages before release. Designer Fumito Ueda wanted to create a unique world so strange in its construction that it would defy any particular time or place. Likewise, the Colossi, arguably the stars of the game, were designed using both natural and mechanical source materials, so players would be unable to discern whether they were animals or machines.

Shadow Of The Colossus defies any specific genre but can be summed up in its structure as 16 boss fights, divided by long stretches of exploration around a desolate land. The game's first public showing came in the form of 'Nico', presenting the game as a very different experience, involving multiple protagonists attacking a Colossus as a group – other aspects, such as the specifics of the hero, Wander, came later, yet the idea of a protagonist and his horse companion existed before the setting did.

Ueda aimed to make each Colossus more than a mere boss battle, however. While he perceived nothing wrong with this traditional design idea, *Shadow Of The Colossus* would be as much about the journey as the fight itself, with the environments designed to create a sense of foreboding as the players discover the Colossi for the first time. *Ico* had built a dedicated audience in the meantime. *Shadow Of The Colossus* was released to greater sales than its predecessor, not to mention a rightfully positive reception from critics.

THE GAME

Shadow Of The Colossus is about the guilt. The unbearable, crushing guilt. As Wander, a man seeking to bring his love back to life by slaying 16 mystical creatures, the entire story of the game is presented through the prism of the character's selfishness – you, as a player, feel as though you're doing something terrible by robbing this fascinating land of its mighty native creatures, and that theme is explored so

Things of note










Returning soon

Announced at TGS, *Shadow Of The Colossus* will return on PS3 next year in a bundle with *Ico*, including HD graphics and Trophies. No titles from the PS2 era are more worthy of such elaborate treatment.

Shared universe

Ico and *Shadow* share a universe, but this is something that only becomes clear once players reach the end of the game. A clever twist explains why Ico was persecuted by the kingdom's people.

Reign Over Me

This Adam Sandler movie featured a large presence from *Shadow Of The Colossus*, as Sandler's character uses the game to come to terms with his overwhelming grief following the death of members from his family.

Hard to find

Like *Ico*, *Shadow Of The Colossus* quickly became an elusive presence at retail, due to the lack of a Platinum rerelease and the fact that each edition of the game came in a cardboard slipcase.

Size matters

Some of the enemies here are bigger than any seen before in a game – such scale adds to the wonder of seeing the Colossi for the first time and creates a real sense of high stakes before the battle begins.



» [PlayStation 2] The environments in *Shadow Of The Colossus* vary depending on the enemy.



» [PlayStation 2] Ueda's next game, *The Last Guardian*, will no doubt be as big a cult hit as *Shadow*.



What the press thought



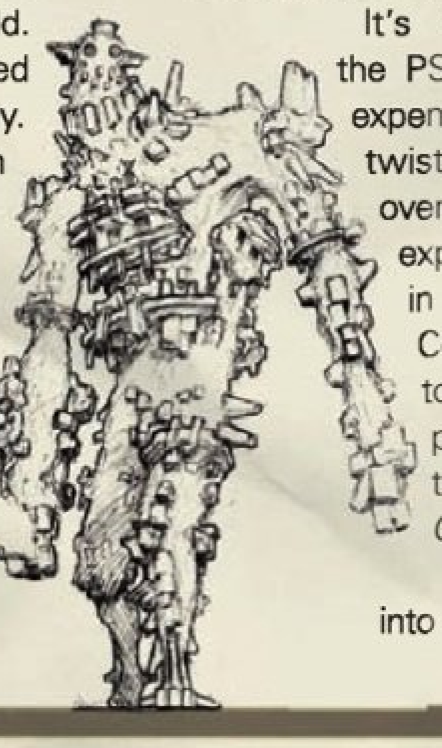
Play
Score: 93%
"It's a magnificent game that offers one of the most original slices of gaming we can remember."



games™
Score: 9/10
"It's achingly beautiful, deeply involving and as breathtaking to watch as it is to play."

cleverly and maturely through the narrative. This is a groundbreaking display of interactive storytelling; your experience, your struggle with each staggeringly impressive beast is the story, while the mythical journey to each battle is an undoubtedly effective and ominous plot device.

The atmosphere is a triumph of art and sound design – the world here is an unending, washed-out labyrinth of echoes, diverse yet almost entirely empty, save for the Colossi, lizards, birds, shrines and a few secret curios for the more ambitious players. There's just something really unsettling about the world. You never quite feel alone – Agro, your trusty steed sees to that – but at the same time you feel lonely. It's a captivating feeling. The expedition to each Colossus, guided by the light of Wander's sword, is a perfect pacing mechanic, building up each reveal to fever pitch before you're finally aware of the challenge that lies ahead of you.



Each Colossus is a carefully crafted puzzle, and it's only through using the environment to his advantage that Wander is able to get the better of each one. The goal is to hunt out their weak spots, then find a way of safely approaching them in order to bring them down, yet it's rarely a straightforward task. The appeal is in the way they look, move and interact with the environment, which varies unexpectedly throughout – highlights include Phalanx, the mighty sand snake that floats over the environment as you try to cling onto its wings; Hydra, the aggressive sea dragon that swims deep beneath a hauntingly dark lake; and Avion, the bird-like creature that instantly transforms your expectations of the game as you try to take it out of the sky in mid-flight.

It's technically amazing, stretching the PS2 to its very limits, often at the expense of the frame rate. In an odd twist, however, the slowdown and overall jerkiness becomes part of the experience, particularly when you're in close, dangerous quarters to the Colossi – it'll certainly be interesting to see how the upcoming 60 frames-per-second HD remake will reshape this staple of the *Shadow Of The Colossus* experience.

Each time Wander jabs his sword into a creature, only for it to fall to the ground and Kow Otani's astonishing score to kick in, elicits a genuine sadness and causes you to reflect upon the protagonist's selfish merits. No other game packs the same emotional impact, or tries anything quite as thematically complex.

WHY IT'S A FUTURE CLASSIC

We love *Shadow Of The Colossus* because it makes us feel something. The art direction here is so accomplished and iconic that, no matter how much 3D graphics evolve over the coming years, the imagination on display here by Ueda and his team will endure. Each creature is an individual masterpiece, and, despite its spiralling difficulty towards the end, it's a terrific journey into the unknown that only a videogame could provide.

Comparing this to the games released at the start of the PS2's lifespan showed just how far the bestselling home console of all time came in terms of its capabilities, as its vast, seamless world was quite unlike anything in terms of technical achievement. Plus, regardless of what we may feel about destroying each of the Colossi, we all know it's cool to kill big monsters. *Shadow Of The Colossus* is an all-round triumph.



Betrayal at Krondor





Some 17 years ago, Dynamix released one of the first 3D role-playing games the world had ever seen. Betrayal At Krondor went on to be an incredible title, taking the genre in new directions in terms of both technology and storytelling. Craig Ritchie speaks to its developers to bring you the tale behind one of the greatest RPGs of the Nineties



It was late 1991 and Dynamix was going strong. Riding on the success of simulation titles such as *A-10 Tank Killer* and *Red Baron* as well as its forays into point-and-click adventures with the likes of *Willy Beamish* and *Rise Of The Dragon*, the, Oregon-based development house was also enjoying the financial backing of the then-industry giant Sierra Online.

Things were good, and company founder Jeff Tunnell felt that it was time for another A-grade title – but instead of a simulation or an adventure, he was thinking role-playing. A shrewd businessman, Tunnell knew that Dynamix would benefit from some new talent who specialised in the genre, and that's where John Cutter came in.

"After Cinemaware shut down I became the director of product development for New World Computing, famous for their *Might And Magic* series of games," says Cutter, whose previous credits included *Might And Magic III* and *Defender Of The Crown*. "It was a talented bunch of guys and that's where I met my good friend Neal Hallford. I wasn't being challenged creatively, so when Jeff Tunnell offered me a senior design role at Dynamix where my only responsibility was to make a fun game, I jumped at the chance."

"After I got set up at Dynamix I pitched some game concepts that Jeff liked, but nothing truly grabbed us," Cutter continues. "Then Jeff showed me a fantasy book he had been reading and said, 'You should contact this Raymond Feist guy and hire him to write us an RPG.' To be honest, I didn't read much fantasy back then so I had no idea that Ray was so successful. It quickly became clear that we could not afford to hire him, but he was interested in licensing his work. I read his *Riftwar* trilogy and loved it, so I worked out a deal with Ray and his agent that allowed us to create a new story in Ray's universe."



» [PC] Dynamix's development team put in great effort to stay true to the background material.

With the licence arranged, Cutter found himself the designer and director of *Betrayal At Krondor*. He knew that he would need a talented game writer and says that the first person who came to mind was Neal Hallford, who he had just worked with on *Might And Magic III* and *Planet's Edge: The Point Of No Return*.

"I went up for an interview," recalls Hallford, "and it was quite a crazy day because I flew up to Eugene from Los Angeles and I got up there and did the usual sort of company interviews – I met with the person who was going to be the head art director, as well as some other folks who were going to be on the project, but Jeff Tunnell was tied up. So, they kept saying 'oh, could you meet with him at 2' and then 'no, we're going to have to push that back until 3', and then finally we were getting down to the time that the last plane was going to leave from Eugene to LA and Jeff said 'I'll just meet you guys at the airport!'

"So my interview with Jeff Tunnell was actually conducted running for my aeroplane!" he laughs. "I chatted with Jeff and then I asked 'so how long is it going to be before I hear about whether you guys want me or not?' and he just looked at John Cutter and said 'do you want him?', John said 'yes', and that was it!"

"Dynamix moved him to Eugene, Oregon," adds Cutter, "and we filled the rest of the team with mostly developers from other groups around the company."

One of those developers was Dynamix employee Nels Bruckner, who had worked on titles such as *A-10*, *Red Baron*, *Die Hard* and the company's adventure games.



IN THE KNOW

- » **PUBLISHER:** SIERRA
- » **DEVELOPER:** DYNAMIX
- » **PLATFORM:** PC
- » **RELEASED:** 1993
- » **GENRE:** RPG
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** £5+

THEIR OWN KIND OF MAGIC

DESPITE MAGIC BEING a prominent feature in the *Riftwar* saga, Feist had not gone in to great detail to name the spells – something obviously necessary for a fantasy RPG. Hallford recalls having to sit with Cutter and figure out what would be the best names for the spells. "That was a whole area where we went off in another direction to many RPGs," he says. "I grew up playing D&D just like anybody else, and their spells often had these really run-of-the-mill names. They didn't sound very cool – 'Sleep' or 'Magic Missile' – so this is where I tried to come up with sort of poetic-sounding names, so I imagined all these old wizards sitting around and trying to come up with elaborate names for their spells. There's an event in the book *Magician* where Pug casts a spell on I think a troll, and it blinded him, and that became one of the first spells you get in *Betrayal At Krondor*: 'Despair Thine Eyes'.

BETRAYAL AT KRONDOR

FEIST'S OWN WORDS

"OBVIOUSLY, THE WORLD in which the game is played is the fruit of years of my work, but the game itself is a wonderful collaborative endeavour that I think adds tremendously to the world of Midkemia", said Raymond Feist in a 1993 interview to promote the game. "When I first played *Betrayal At Krondor*, it was a very odd – pleasant, but odd – experience to be encountering things in my world that I hadn't authored. It was surprising, it was unexpected, and it was fun. The game is designed so that you have bookmarks – literally, they call them bookmarks – where you can say 'I'm saving the game at this point', at any point in the game. It's not one of those horrible, miserable games where you have to battle your way back to a particular location before you're allowed to save the game. So, you can play it in little, teeny, manageable chunks, and it's a wonderful, rich experience."

You can read more of what Feist had to say in the game's manual if you purchase the title from **GOG.com**, along with its semi-sequel *Betrayal At Antara*, for about £3.70.

"At Dynamix at that time we more or less had the resources to do whatever we wanted," recalls Bruckner, who was appointed the role of lead programmer on *Betrayal At Krondor*. "The technology was always evolving as so many people were contributing to and advancing the tech at that point. Dynamix had an amazing number of good tech guys at that time. One of the big challenges we had on *Krondor* was that we didn't have tech to draw fully textured polygons for the terrain quick enough, but we wanted a more realistic look than we could achieve with solid fill polygons. That sounds crazy by today's standards, but at the time it was a big deal. We developed some really specific tech that allowed us to procedurally shade and dither the polys as they were drawn. A lot of the graphical detail that we added in was geared toward providing a richer look, but just couldn't be run at a very high frame rate on the hardware of the time. Early on in the design phase we decided to present a nicer-looking game at 'near realtime', rather than sacrificing the look for frame rate."

Being an RPG, *Krondor* of course also had to have a good combat system, so Cutter and Bruckner set about working out the battle rules and dynamic. The result was a blend of some older RPGs as well as how Cutter felt an RPG combat system should look, feel, and function.

"I worked a lot with John to figure out how to get the desired combat experience for the player with the technology at hand," says Bruckner. "I had a lot of freedom there to architect the system as well as to code the various graphical effects, the enemy behaviours etc. In a lot of ways it really pushed me technically."

On top of the technical challenges and a novel combat system was another area where *Betrayal At Krondor* really shone: the story. Cutter wanted to stay true to the game's literary roots and he and Hallford settled on the idea of portraying the game like a fantasy novel.

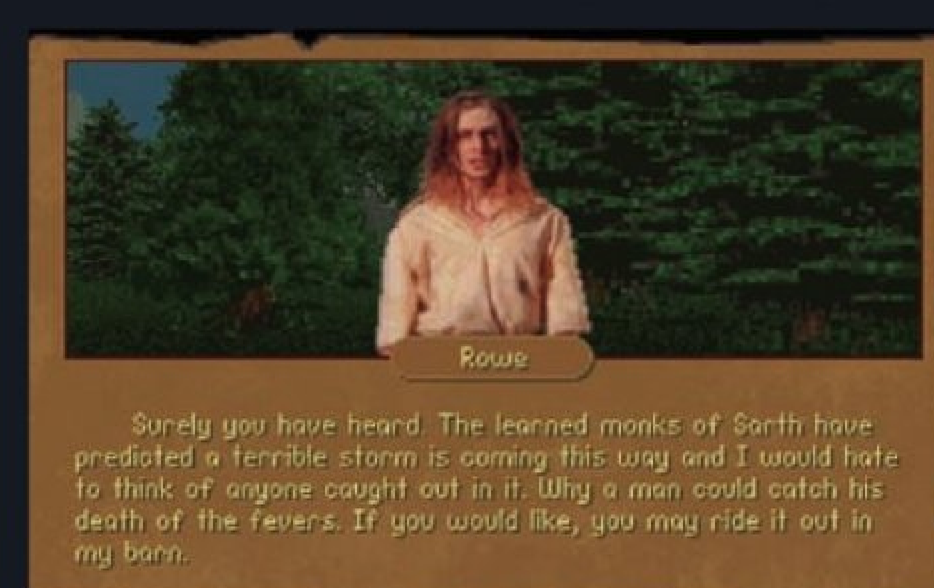
"This played to Neal's strengths too," explains Cutter. "It gave him a lot of room for the storytelling that he does so brilliantly. It was a pretty controversial decision because most role-playing games back then focused on just a single character or a group of characters. *Krondor* featured characters coming and going from chapter to chapter, and I worried that this would be off-putting for RPG fans, but fortunately most just seemed to accept this, despite my initial concerns."

"My thing was that I never ever wanted to play a game simply based on a book or a movie that was just a straight-up interpretation of that material," says Hallford on what motivated his approach to the writing in *Krondor*. "For me, the thing is that I already know the ending! I'd rather write a new story set in the same universe and using some of the same characters, so that people familiar with Feist's work could come into the game and play with familiar characters that they knew and they loved."

Hallford admits that he had not heard of Feist up until this point, and so went out and bought everything that he had written thus far. He then spent his first few weeks at Dynamix engrossed in Feist's books, both as a means of getting to grips with the story and



» [PC] What's an RPG without a great inventory screen?



» [PC] One of the random encounters written into the game. This guy is not to be trusted, wethinks…

> **"It was Feist's job to say 'can we do this?' while it was always my job to say 'no, we can't do that because we have to fit it in so much RAM'"**



» [PC] The sewers under Krondor looked not unlike those in *Eye Of The Beholder*.



» [PC] "Looking at the game now I cringe at the visuals of many of the characters." – John Cutter

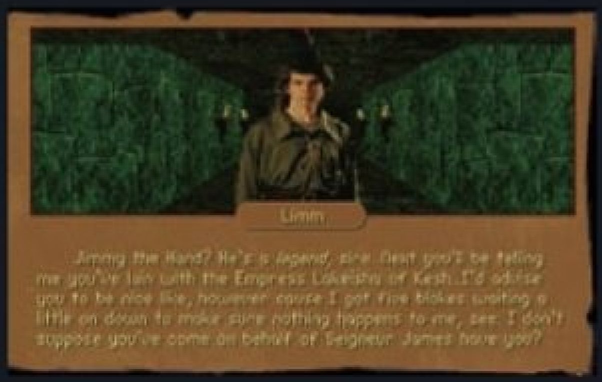


» [PC] Hallford and Cutter's writing efforts shine through everywhere, as in this detailed weaponry description.

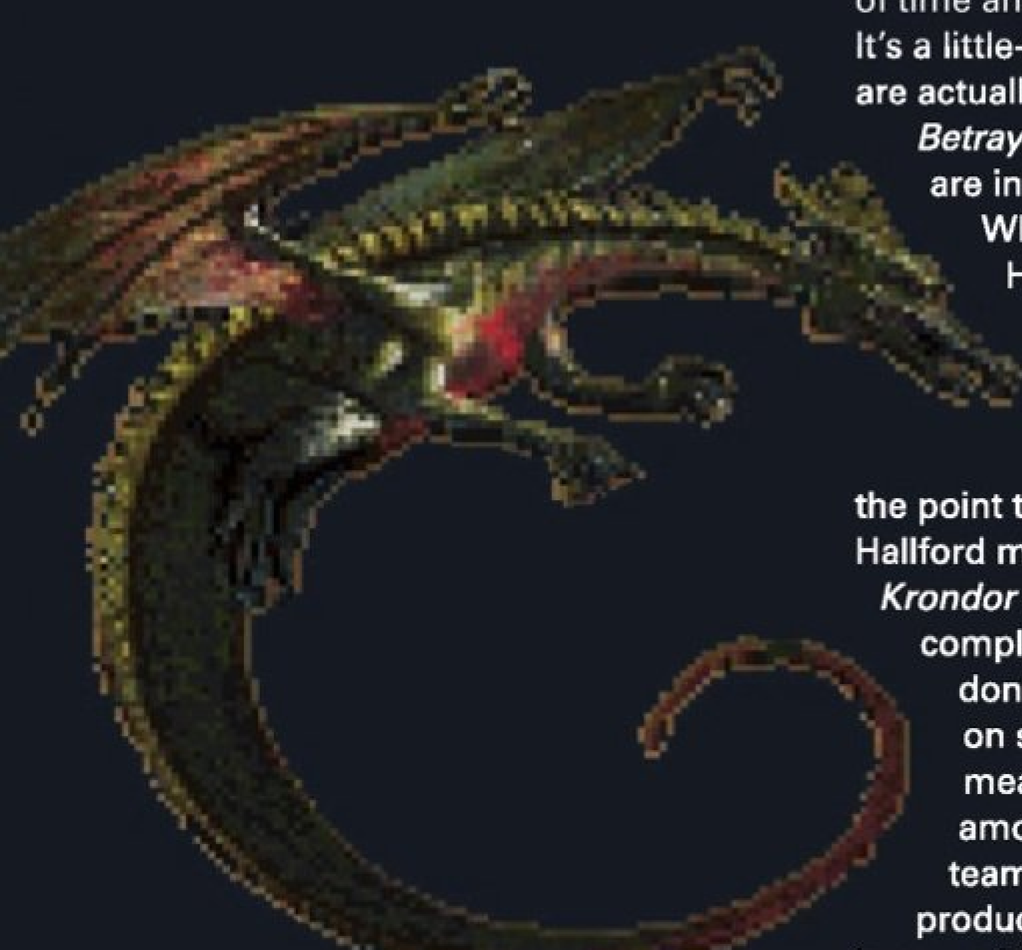

» [PC] The overhead map was 100 per cent accurate, but didn't reveal any enemy locations.











the world that he had created, as well as to familiarise himself with Feist's writing style.

"By the time we were done with the game, I had read through the entire series at least five times," he says. "That was many years ago now, but there was a time when I could pretty much have told you where a line of dialogue was on any particular page! So, I was reading through the books and there was this noticeable gap between *A Darkness At Sethanon* and *The King's Buccaneer* – there's a 20-year gap and I said 'that's where we should place *Betrayal At Krondor*!"

And as any who have played through the game will know, Hallford put an immense amount of time and energy into the writing. It's a little-known fact that there are actually more words of text in *Betrayal At Krondor* than there are in some of Feist's novels. What's more, Cutter and Hallford were actually so busy writing that they were still including new text into the game right until the point that it entered testing. Hallford maintains that *Betrayal At Krondor* is to this day the most complex game story he's ever done. On top of this, working on such a big franchise meant there was a fair amount of pressure for the team to produce a finished product that Feist would be happy with.

"Ray was very busy with his latest novel," recalls Cutter. "So he wasn't that actively involved in *Krondor*'s development. Early on I sent him the design document and a rough draft of the story and a week or so later he sent back pages of great notes – and some critical notes that were a little painful to read. After that he didn't even see the game until we flew him to CES to help us launch the title. We were all extremely nervous to show him what we had been working on, but to our great relief he got it right away and loved it! In fact, after the show he started calling me at the office several times a week (or more) to talk about the game and tell me his thoughts and ideas for a sequel."

"To be honest, he and I often butted heads on the project," adds Bruckner. "It was to some extent his job to say 'can we do this?' while it was always my job to say 'no, we can't do that because we have to fit it in so much RAM' etc. To some extent that kept us from really interacting much on a personal level, which looking back I regret. I think we both pushed to make the game better in the end."

With all the elements in place, the technology sorted, the story plotted and the testing complete, the game shipped. And things didn't look good.

"Unfortunately, the initial sales of the game were a little slow," remembers Cutter, "and the new president of Dynamix (he used to be the company accountant) fired me and cancelled the sequel. Ray wisely bought back the game rights for practically nothing and it looked like that was going to be the end of the story. We had been working on a CD-ROM version at the time of my dismissal and Sierra planned to drop the price a bit just to clear out the inventory. But then a funny thing happened: *Krondor* started to win awards. Lots of awards. And the CD-ROM version began to fly off the shelves. The game became so successful Sierra tried to hire me back to make the sequel, but I was already working at a new company. So they took the game code and created *Betrayal In Antara* since they didn't have the world/story rights any more. Meanwhile, Ray went to a company called 7th Level and helped them create and publish *Return To Krondor*. I never got a chance to play these games, but I don't think either was a big seller."

And so it was that despite being an award-winning bestseller, *Krondor* would be the only *Riftwar* game Dynamix would release. It's built on source material just begging to be made into RPGs, but, unfortunately for its fans, business decisions and licensing complications meant, as John Cutter says, "that was the end of the 'franchise'".

Thanks to Nels Bruckner of Playdom, John Cutter of Big Fish Games and Neal Hallford of Swords & Circuitry Studios for all their help in making this article possible.

THE UNCONVERTED

Arcade games that never made it home

TECMO KNIGHT

■ **Developer:** Tecmo ■ **Year:** 1989 ■ **Genre:** Beat-'em-up

■ **If the not too dissimilar worlds of *Splatterhouse*, *Altered Beast* and *Golden Axe* had ever combined into one beat-'em-up in the early Nineties, we reckon that the resultant marriage of blood and violence would have spawned something like this unconverted fantasy brawler by Tecmo.**

Tecmo Knight (also known as *Wild Fang*) takes choice elements from these popular franchises and blends them together to create a decent side-scrolling brawler that fans of the genre should certainly take time to investigate. You assume the role of an armoured warrior named Tecmo Knight, and the game's gimmick is that your hero has the ability to switch between two different mounts at any point in the game. These include a powerful giant reminiscent of Blaster from *Mad Max 3* and a cool Battle Cat-style tiger, and each has their own attributes. Collection of an orb power-up during the game will also summon a third beast to lend a hand: a red dragon that can effortlessly vanquish enemies with a single blast of its fire breath.

With all variation in combat coming courtesy of these different transformations, rather than through a deep assortment of punches and kicks, the gameplay can, at times, feel quite limited. This is offset somewhat by a nice assortment of oversized enemies and bosses, which, in similar style to *Golden Axe*, dwarf your hero. Because of this size difference, the knight does have a handy move at his disposal, whereby he can throw himself onto the backs of the game's giant enemies and pummel their faces until their complexions resemble a basket of unripe tomatoes. This leads us quite nicely on to another noteworthy element of *Tecmo Knight*: it's incredibly violent. Heads fly off, faces deteriorate, and blood and guts flood the screen. It's certainly not a game you should be letting your kids play, that's for sure.

There's a wide variety of enemies to fight too. Ogres, demons, mythological beasts and things that look like alcoholic ninja turtles appear on screen, and all can be beaten into bloody and soggy messes before your very eyes.

A few levels in it becomes clear, though, that the game is pretty limited. It's also frustrating at times, especially with many of the levels being annoyingly booby trapped. Bombs litter the floor and bridges fall away, leaving you little space to manoeuvre and avoid enemy attacks.

That there was never a home conversion of *Tecmo Knight* is no surprise to us. The game wasn't that big of a hit on its release and, while it certainly has something going for it, there are far better examples of the scrolling beat-'em-up genre out there.



CONVERTED ALTERNATIVE

GOLDEN AXE 1989

For the ultimate in arcade fantasy beat-'em-up action it has to be *Golden Axe*. With animal mounts, oversized enemies and a penchant for gore, *Golden Axe* is a close contemporary to *Tecmo Knight*. It was also converted to more machines than we could possibly list in this tiny boxout.



IN DEPTH

» This is your hero, Tecmo Knight. He might have a rubbish name but he does have some cool friends who he can call upon during battle: a giant, a tiger and even a dragon.

» As you can see from the mess we've made of this poor ogre's face, *Tecmo Knight* is pretty bloody. That's not necessarily a bad thing, though.

» Not only do you need to be wary of the game's hideous-looking enemies, but also of the levels too. Many are strewn with annoying hazards.





RACING HERO

■ **Developer:** Sega ■ **Year:** 1989 ■ **Genre:** Racing



» [Arcade] The influence of *OutRun* on *Racing Hero*'s visual style is clear.

■ **With its mixture of cross-continent racing, snaking roadways, colourful visuals and branching stages, this relatively obscure Sega racer plays like a cross between Sega's *Hang-On* and *OutRun*.**

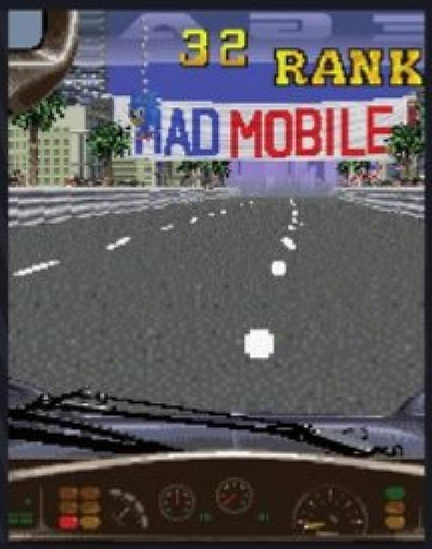
Steering a superbike seemingly ridden by the same chap from *Hang-On* – you can tell it's him as whoever it is is wearing those familiar red, white and blue bike leathers – *Racing Hero* was a fun but untidy-looking racer that ran from the same Sega X-Board arcade hardware as *After Burner*. So it really is something of a Sega Neapolitan.

While fun enough, in typical Sega checkpoint racer fashion, frustration is never far away, as the game only gives you a punishing amount of time to reach the checkpoints that section the race. In fact, get clipped by a rival motorcyclist or a careless lorry driver during a race and you can kiss goodbye to seeing your two wheels ever passing the magical time-gifting line. That the very similar-feeling *Rad Mobile*, released the same year, saw a conversion on the Sega Saturn probably means that this one was mooted for one at one time. The fact that we think its unconverted status to be no huge tragedy, however, should explain why we're not surprised that it remains stranded in the arcades.

CONVERTED ALTERNATIVE

RAD MOBILE 1991

The obvious choice led us to either *Hang-On* or *OutRun*, but we opted for another of Sega's arcade racers. Famed for marking the first ever appearance of Sonic – he featured as a rear-view mirror ornament – this 1991 racer not only ran on different Sega hardware in the System 32 but also saw a home conversion on the Saturn.



CONVERTED ALTERNATIVE

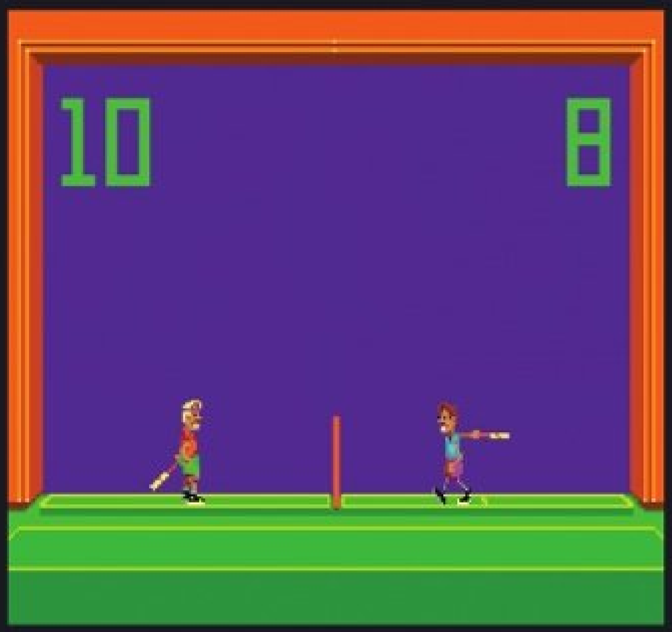


PONG 1972

As *Off The Wall* is basically just a colourful, skewed version of *Pong*, that's what we're going to recommend. It's the best chance this classic rudimentary ping-pong simulator will ever get of appearing in this section. The game has been converted and cloned more times than any other game in history. Probably.

OFF THE WALL

■ **Developer:** Bally Sente ■ **Year:** 1984 ■ **Genre:** Sports



» [Arcade] While not as much of a classic as *Pong*, *Off The Wall* is a fun and competitive multiplayer game.

■ **Here's an interesting and charming variant of *Pong* that we're starting to get really quite obsessed with in the office this month.** The brainchild of Nolan Bushnell, *Off The Wall* basically mixes together elements of squash, volleyball and keepie-uppie into an enjoyable virtual racquet game. The concept is as simple as it is addictive: you play as a tennis player with a stiff, unbendable arm, and must return a tennis ball against one of three different computer opponents. Controlled using a combination of controls, you are given 360-degree control over your character's fully outstretched arm with a dial, and can move your player back and forth using a joystick. A nice touch about the game is that there are several ways by which you can score a point: you can either hit the ball into the net, hit your opponent with the ball, hit the ball four times before returning it or, finally, if your opponent fails a return. Whether it was intentionally named after Michael Jackson's seminal album we can't say, though as it is known for being an incredibly rare machine to come by nowadays we suspect the name didn't help in increasing sales or awareness of the machine.

BEST LEFT IN THE ARCADE

SCUD HAMMER

■ **Developer:** Jaleco ■ **Year:** 1994 ■ **Genre:** Strategy

■ **Adapting rock-paper-scissors into a videogame seems a ridiculous idea, given that success in the game rests on luck and reading the 'tells' given off by human opponents.** While utilised brilliantly in *Alex Kidd In Miracle World*, where it played a role in boss fights, Jaleco got a tad excited and decided to base an entire game around the concept, justifying the decision by dressing it in one of the most insane arcade games to ever appear on these pages. After selecting your opponent from the faces on display, it's straight into the second-guessing action. Looking directly into the eyes of your rival, the gameplay involves simply selecting either rock, paper or scissors and then waiting to see what your opponent has selected. If you beat them, the titular Scud Hammer will come into play and proceed to violently beat your adversary until their eyes explode, their lips swell up, and their brains spill from their collapsed noses. We've played Game & Watch titles with more depth.



DESERT ISLAND DISKS

Steve Woita

What cherished games would you take to the island?

He made the VCS talk, Sonic spin and is now making games for the iPhone. Steve Woita tells Paul Drury about hyperactive hedgehogs, mutant mice and Tasmanian Devils

"When I go from company to company, I try to work out what their framework is, how they make games, adapt to that and learn from it," says Steve Woita, a man whose long career has taken in such industry giants as Atari, Apple and Sega. "When I started out in the Eighties, you did everything: the programming, the design, the graphics, the testing. Then, as the industry matured, if that's what you wanna call it, everything got sub-divided into tasks. It's a blessing and a curse. Like, what am I?"



Perhaps you're something of a chameleon, we suggest.

"Definitely!" he laughs. "In fact, if you look at the end credits, it's my name below *Kid Chameleon*. He was supposed to be me!"

Long before Steve was lending his likeness to a much-loved Mega Drive title, he was putting himself in the game. Born in San Francisco in the Sixties, just a little too late for Flower Power, he had his love-ins at Radio Shack, getting his own TRS-80 after graduating from High School aged 17. At college, he majored in electrical engineering and joined Apple at the end of the Seventies, initially troubleshooting faulty Apple II motherboards and learning to code in 6502 assembly. He soon moved over to its R&D department, working on the Lisa project and then joining the Apple II group, where he met the influential Bill Budge.

"Bill would come by a couple of times a month and show us his latest version of *Raster Blaster* and I was blown away by that," enthuses Steve. "I'd be asking him all these questions, like how did you get the ball to move that fast, how do you get rid of flicker, how are you doing this?! I used to bug him and Andy Hertzfeld all the time…"

If you don't ask you don't learn, and Steve's inquiring mind meant he became technician for Wendell Sanders, who designed the Apple 3, and then worked for Walt Broedner, working on the Adam and Eve chips. His intimate knowledge of the interior of an Apple II meant that when Bill Budge suggested it would be good to have two joysticks inputs to allow a move authentic *Crazy Climber* experience on the machine, Steve was ripping apart VCS controllers before you could say 'Nichibutsu'. At the same time, his colleague Keithen Hayenga was trying to wire up multiple paddles to the Apple, so the pair travelled up together to Sirius Software in Sacramento to pitch their peripherals.

"They had this really cool warehouse with a ton of boxes full of games in plastic baggies with nice cardboard artwork," remembers Steve. "The guy there, Jerry Jewell, said why don't you merge these two devices into one. I was like, makes sense! On the drive back we pulled over on the street and drew out the circuitry for it while it was fresh in our heads. By the time we got home, we pretty much knew how we were going to make the thing…"

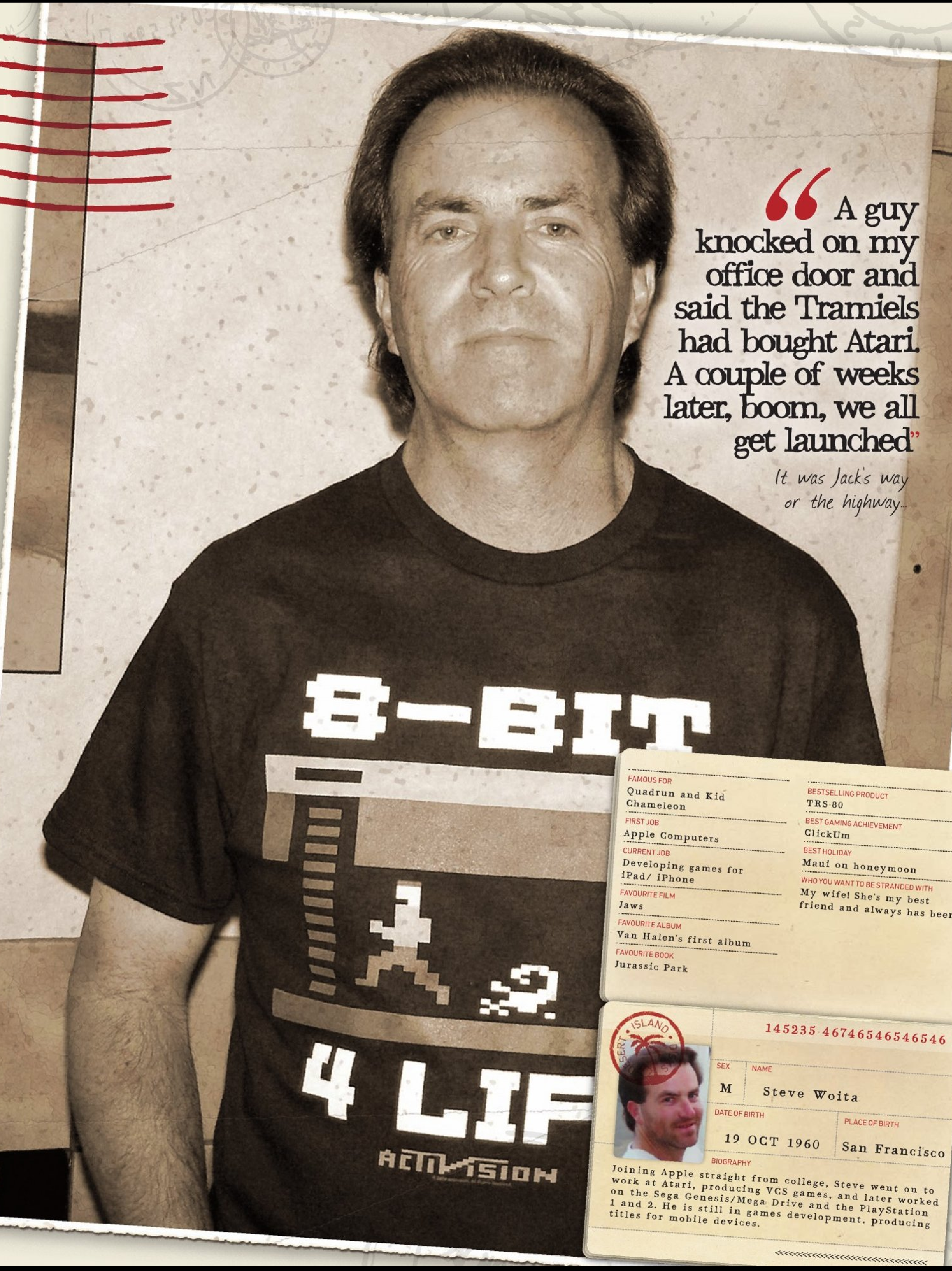
The result was the Joyport, released in 1981 and bundled with the four-player *Computer Foosball*, a prescient device considering the proliferation of ports we now expect from our consoles and computers. It earned the pair welcome royalty cheques too while still working for Apple, but Keithen was tempted away to Atari and diehard gamer Steve soon followed.

Trivia

When working on *Garfield*, Steve was visited by cartoonist Jim Davis. "He sat at my desk, playing *Taz*," recalls Steve. "I started telling him about my ideas for *Garfield* and he just said, don't worry, I trust ya!" A laidback cat, indeed…

"I loved it at Apple but I knew all the Atari coin-op games and the 2600 was my favourite machine," says Steve. "Keithen got me an interview and I went up in my lunch hour. My first experience as I got there was hearing this 'woosh'. I thought, what the heck is that? Then Howard Scott Warshaw comes round the corner with an Indiana Jones hat on and a bullwhip. I'm like, oh my God!"

Initially hired to work on the Atari 5200, codenamed Pam at this point, Steve begged to begin on his beloved 2600. Management relented and he settled in an office tucked away at the back of the building, out of sight and mind, experimenting with what the machine could do. The result was *Quadrun*, an innovative game with hypnotic use of colour and the first VCS game to contain speech without the need for additional hardware (see 'Look Who's Talking' boxout). Was this a case of the new boy trying to show the old hands he could still teach the machine a thing or two, Steve?



“A guy knocked on my office door and said the Tramiels had bought Atari. A couple of weeks later, boom, we all get launched”

It was Jack's way or the highway…

FAMOUS FOR
Quadrun and Kid Chameleon

FIRST JOB
Apple Computers

CURRENT JOB
Developing games for iPad/ iPhone

FAVOURITE FILM
Jaws

FAVOURITE ALBUM
Van Halen's first album

FAVOURITE BOOK
Jurassic Park

BESTSELLING PRODUCT
TRS-80

BEST GAMING ACHIEVEMENT
ClickUm

BEST HOLIDAY
Maui on honeymoon

WHO YOU WANT TO BE STRANDED WITH
My wife! She's my best friend and always has been

145235-46746546546546

SEX
M

NAME
Steve Woita

DATE OF BIRTH
19 OCT 1960

PLACE OF BIRTH
San Francisco

BIOGRAPHY
Joining Apple straight from college, Steve went on to work at Atari, producing VCS games, and later worked on the Sega Genesis/Mega Drive and the PlayStation 1 and 2. He is still in games development, producing titles for mobile devices.

Timeline



QUADRUN
■ **YEAR:** 1983
■ **VERSION:** VCS
Steve's first VCS titled proved the old girl could still be taught new tricks. Original cartridges fetch big bucks.



TAZ
■ **YEAR:** 1983
■ **VERSION:** VCS
This fast-paced eat-'em-up was given an Asterix makeover for its European release, which also hit shelves in 1983.



KRAZY KREATURES
■ **YEAR:** 1990
■ **VERSION:** NES
Steve's brief spell at Bitmasters saw him helping out on this animal-matching puzzler. *Bejeweled* fans take note.



KID CHAMELEON
■ **YEAR:** 1992
■ **VERSION:** Mega Drive
Ambitious and inventive, this fine platformer proved that if you want to get ahead, get a hat. Now available on the Virtual Console.

The Team On Woita

Here's what **Retro Gamer** has to say about Steve's games…





Darran Jones
Kid Chameleon, for me, is easily one of the best games that Steve has been involved with. Full of challenge and bursting with clever ideas, it's a wonderfully robust platformer that I still regularly play on my Sega Nomad. If you've never played it than hunt it down straight away. You won't be disappointed.





Paul Drury
Whether he's making them or talking about them, Steve's enthusiasm for games has remained undimmed for almost three decades. *Quadrun* was a real technical achievement, he's had his hand in some fine *Sonic* titles and as for *Kid Chameleon*, it's hats off to Woita…





Stuart Hunt
Being a massive *Kid Chameleon* fan, Steve certainly has a supporter here. But the thing I found most interesting about Steve's past was reading about the cancelled projects he worked on. That *Police Academy* game featuring jetpacks sounded bonkers, and I bet that *Waterworld* game on the Saturn is worth a few bob.



» [NES] Track data for *Super Sprint* was Steve's first task at Tengen.

"Oh no, everyone was helping each other and I was in heaven," he laughs, "But then marketing playtested it with a focus group predominantly of 12-year-old girls. All I heard for two hours was, 'It's not like *Pac-Man*'. I had my head in my hands. Why can't we have some boys in here who like space games!"

The upshot of this disappointing reaction was that the game was only made available by mail-order to Atari Club members, making it one of the console's rarest cartridges and much sought-after by VCS collectors.

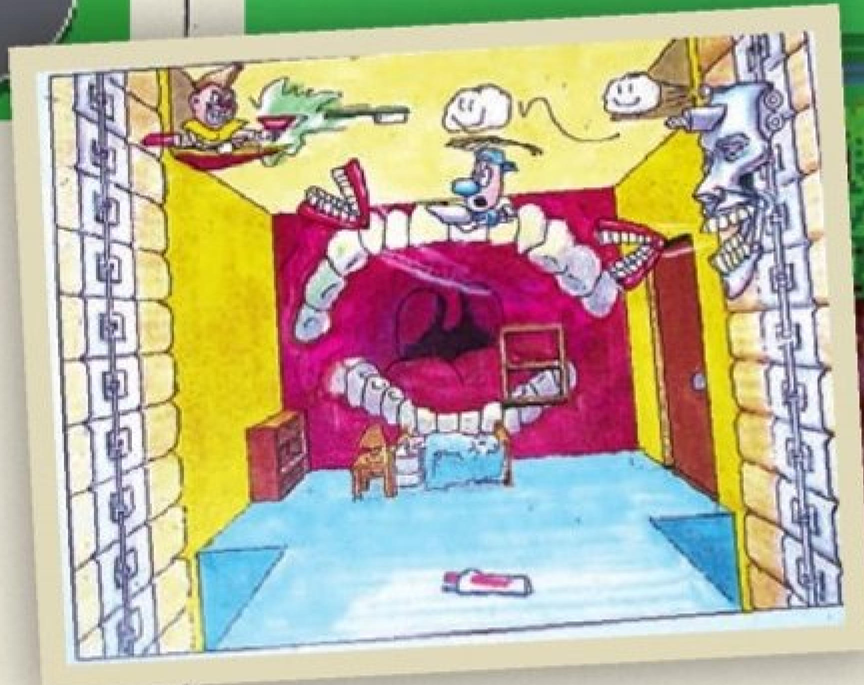
Steve had no such number worries with his next game, *Taz*. Atari built half a million units of this fast-paced take on the exploits of the Tasmanian Devil, but when it came time for the PAL version, someone sensibly pointed out that no one in Europe had heard of the Looney Tunes licence and suggested changing the theme to Asterix instead.

"I was like, who?" says Steve, wryly. "I was dead against it, but they sent me books and Suki Lee, who was working on the Obelisk game, persuaded me. So I found out about this character Asterix and what he liked and didn't like… like, keep away from the harp because he hates that!"

Steve made some heroic use of horizontal splitting techniques to create a multitude of sprites on screen from just the five objects available on the VCS and delivered a fast-

> "I loved the Virtual Boy. It whacked photons straight onto your retina"
>
> *Steve never found the VB a headache to work on*





» An **RG** exclusive: a game design document from the unreleased *Spinny And Spike* Mega Drive project.

paced game with plenty of character. Keeping the cartoon theme, Steve began work on a *Garfield* game, involving the ginger puss chasing after Nermal, eating hamburgers and avoiding flowerpots, with bonus rounds featuring Odie-fuelled nightmares. "It was about halfway done," Steve recalls. "We were going to make it a big 16K cart with a ton of screens, then some guy knocks on my office and says we've been bought out by the Tramiels. I'm like, okay, and get back to work on *Garfield*. I figured I had another three months left on it. A couple of weeks later, boom, we all get launched. If you wanted to work on games, especially if it had a licence, you had no chance."

So Steve left and returned to tinkering with hardware, again melding together two input devices into the MouseStick, before being lured back to Atari's game group, Tengen. After some meticulous work entering track data for *Super Sprint* on the NES, he got to work on a game version of the *Police Academy* movie. Did this involve a stage where you had to sneak behind a podium and perform fellatio on Commandant Lassard?

"No, it was a scrolling shooter game," he chuckles. "Guys with large heads on tiny bodies flying around with jetpacks and shooting the bad guys to arrest them. The bonus wave had a coffee cup collecting doughnuts!"

Steve says the game tested well but bizarrely management handed it over to someone else to begin from scratch, and when this inferior effort failed to impress, the project was

1992



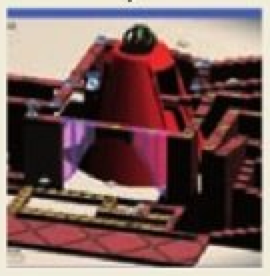
SONIC 2
■ **YEAR:** 1992
■ **VERSION:** Mega Drive
Steve helped out during development crunch time on what is usually regarded as the blue hedgehog's finest hour.

1993



SONIC SPINBALL
■ **YEAR:** 1993
■ **VERSION:** Mega Drive
This pinball-themed outing for Sonic was bundled with the Genesis/Mega Drive, making it one of Steve's best known titles.

1996



GUBBLE
■ **YEAR:** 1996
■ **VERSION:** PC
This update of sorts of Atari's *Crystal Castles*, which Steve worked on with Franz Lanzinger, has recently been given an HD re-release.

2010



DUNKIT DELUXE
■ **YEAR:** 2010
■ **VERSION:** iPhone/iPad
Steve's doughnut-munching Flash game is now available on the iPhone, with frosting you can almost taste.



» [Mega Drive] *Kid Chameleon*: Helmet cool…

cancelled. It was a fate shared by the NES conversion of *Xybots*, on which he worked, and so when he was asked to convert *S.T.U.N. Runner* to the console, he said no and left Tengen to join old Atari buddy Franz '*Crystal Castles*' Lanzinger at Bitmasters. He helped out on the design of *Krazy Kreatures*, a clever 'match three' puzzle game that precedes *Bejeweled* by two decades, before joining Mediagenic (aka Activision) and getting to work on Nintendo's top secret new hardware.

"We were one of the few that had a development system for the SNES," notes Steve. "Nintendo was very strict. [The system] was in a room with just six keys. The janitors didn't get in there… man, that room got pretty dirty! When I'd been at Tengen, Franz had shown me these high level macros Dave Theurer had used like a million years ago on *Tempest*. They generated some pretty tight 6502 code. We used them to help get a sprite engine running at 60 frames per second. We were working on this boss game based on a nightmare. We had a giant clown's head that you fired doughnuts at. You hit the ears and they wiggled and eventually came off and became sharks. It was whacked…"

Steve is swift to point out that he's never even had a cigarette, let alone hallucinogens. The intriguing title sadly went up in smoke and he and Keith Kirby, still a major figure at Activision today, moved on to updating *Pitfall!*, with some fancy rotoscoping techniques. "We digitised Keith wearing Pitfall Harry's trademark hat and it was looking really good," explains Steve. "I don't know why it got cancelled. Mediagenic was in turmoil."

Time for another sharp exit, so Steve phoned his old mate Mark Cerny, who he knew from Tengen days when Mark had been at the nearby Sega Technical Institute. He was promptly hired and set to work on *Kid Chameleon*, wearing as many different hats as the lead character.

"Mark had started the game and I took on a multi-tasking role: part producer, programmer and designer," explains Steve. "I loved doing boss characters and did all of those. Rick Macaraeg was in charge of the overall look of the game… in fact, he kept saying *Kid Chameleon* was meant to look like me! He would tell our Japanese colleagues, because we were like a hybrid company, we'd learn from them and they would learn from us, he kept telling them I played tennis with John McEnroe and sparred with Bruce Lee, all this junk. Crazy guy."

The game remains an ambitious, fondly remembered title, with clothes, hairstyles and an irreverent attitude very much of its time. Steve next worked on another icon of the era, helping out on *Sonic 2*, and was rewarded with a far greater role on the next outing for the hedgehog, though it actually came at the expense of a pet project of his own.

"Jason Plumb and I were working on a game called *Spinny And Spike*," explains Steve. "We had the first few rounds done when this *Spinball* project, which was being done outside, came round and it needed a lot of help. It was being done in C and all of us back then were working in handcrafted 68000 code. Christmas was coming and we got pulled off our project to get it out. We worked with the team in Redwood City, optimising the code to make it run faster. And I got to work on that final Robotnik boss!"

Look Who's Talking

Released in a limited run of 10,000 in 1983, *Quadrun* is most notable for chanting its title repeatedly between levels – quite a technical achievement for a console created in the mid-Seventies. "We were using some software hacked out on an Atari 800 hooked to a microphone," explains Steve. "My buddy spent all day recording my voice and getting it down to 700 bytes. Then I had to work out how I could get the speech in the game as it took so much processing power so I thought, 'Okay, I'll do it between waves – shut off the screen and give the processor over 100 per cent to the sound'. I wasn't even thinking this was the first cartridge game to have speech without an add-on." Getting hold of an original cartridge will cost you a packet but you can find this rarity on 2003's *Atari Anthology*, on the Atari Flashback 2 standalone machine or through Microsoft's Game Room service.

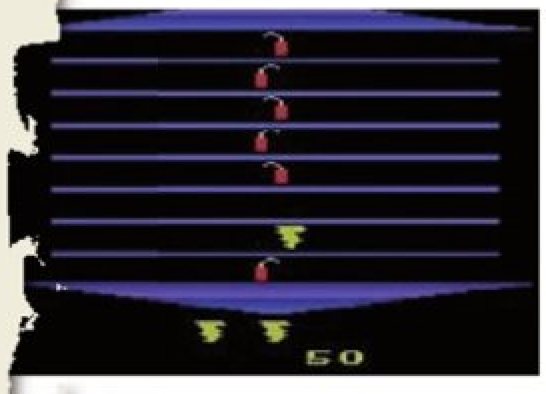
Steve at work on the final Sonic Spinball boss: the Robotnik Ship





Woita on Woita

Steve picks his three favourite projects from his long career



■ **TAZ** ATARI 2600
The first game I worked on and went to my local store and saw it on the shelf. I did pretty much everything on the game and seeing it in shrink-wrap next to these other games I loved playing… everything just kind went quiet and I froze. I just couldn't believe it. This is what I wanted to do!



■ **QUADRUN** ATARI 2600
It was an experiment and I was very happy it got released but it has this new life now. When I go to these conferences about retro games, everyone asks about it. It's worth a lot of money – a couple of thousand dollars if it's sealed. Yeah, I've got a few. I wish I'd bought a pallet!



■ **KID CHAMELEON** MEGA DRIVE
I had a lot of fun working on it, in what I saw as a big team at the time. During crunch time, my wife would come in on the weekend and do her medical studying while I was working away on it, but it was all fun. And I really like how it turned out.

DESERT ISLAND DISKS

Readers' Questions

Mayhem: How do you feel about *Quadrun* being available on Game Room?
I was completely floored when I heard that. Curt Vendel emailed me up and told me and I thought, maybe they're thinking of a different game? Then I remembered they had these emulators. I'm very happy and excited that stuff I worked on is still going on.

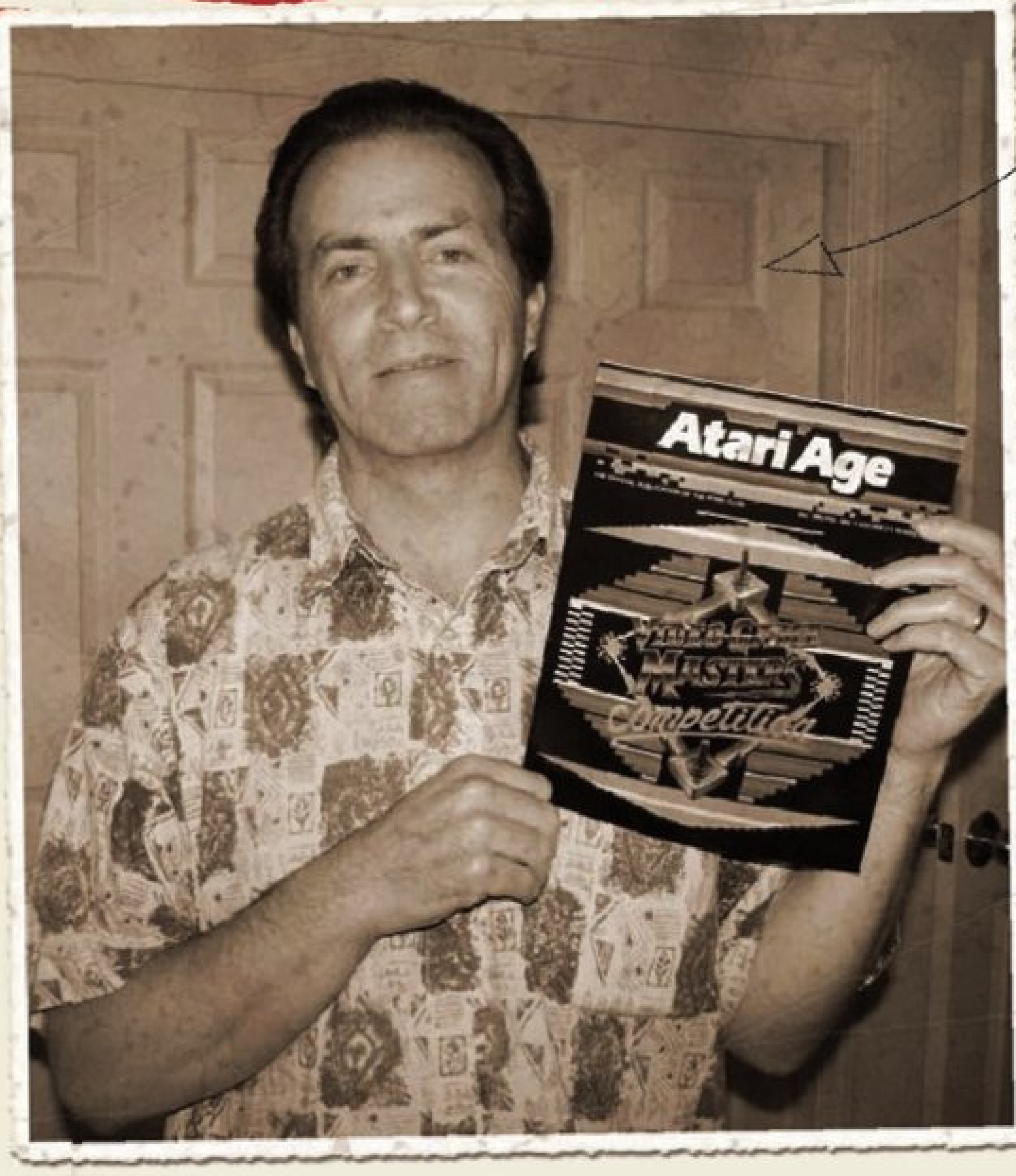
TwoHeadedBoy: How does it feel to wake up every morning knowing you had a hand in creating *Sonic 2*, the greatest game of all time?
Wow! I appreciate the enthusiasm though I wish I'd had more to do with the game.

Cafeman: Are there any 2600 games you still find fun?
Oh yeah! *River Raid* is awesome, *Yars' Revenge* is always a blast and *Turmoil* by Mark Turmell, one of the greatest game designers on the planet.

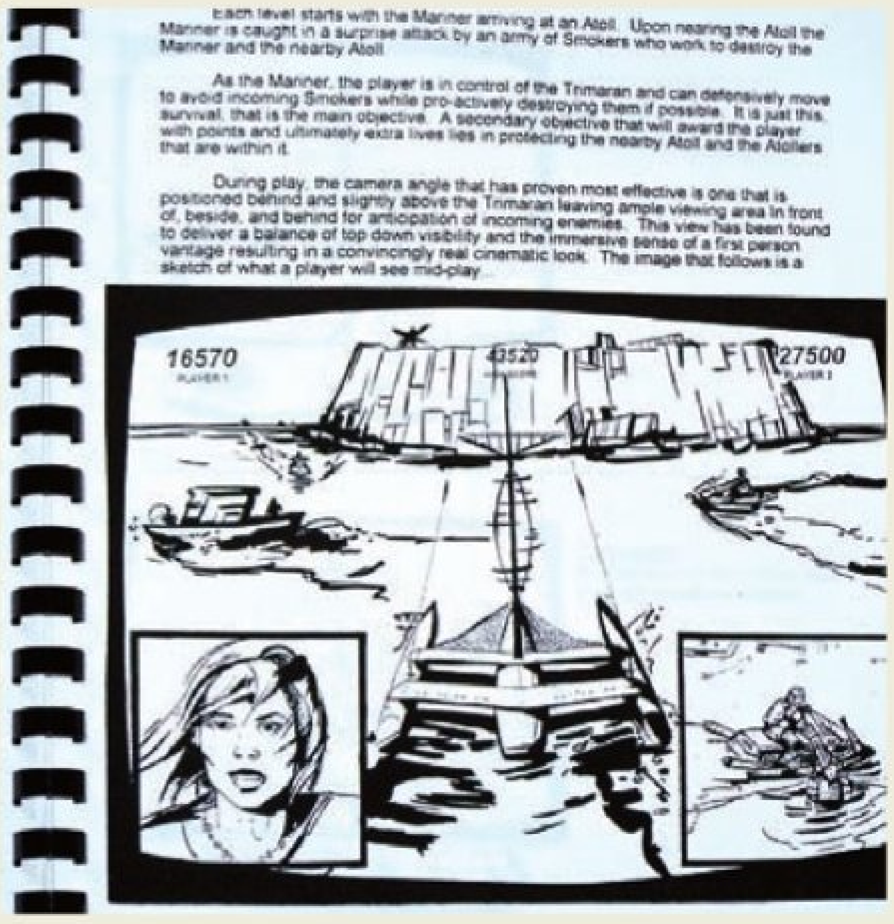
ParanoidMarvin: The speech in *Quadrun* – how did you succeed where others had failed or had nobody tried before?
I'd worked out if I took this and that and put them together I could make the game talk. I was big on trying to name characters and I thought if between waves I could actually say something that would be great. I wanted it to say all the characters' names but we didn't have enough space to do that.

Miketendo: How hard was working on the *Water World* licence?
The licence was great – they let us do whatever we wanted. We travelled down to LA to meet with the studio to present the idea and they were fine with it. We were trying to get James Earl Jones to do the voiceover but he wanted an astronomical amount of money.

JetSetWilly: Were there any plans for a follow up to *Kid Chameleon*?
Yes, and I was the main instigator. The entire team was used to the tools so I said let's start work on the second one. I heard indirectly that marketing wanted us to move on to *Sonic* and didn't want us to work on a sequel. I just couldn't work that out. We were ripe and ready and wanted to do it, but we just didn't get the green light. There was going to be a lot of bosses in it, that's for sure! I wanted fewer lengthy rounds with more bosses that you had to work out how to defeat.



Steve holding the issue of Atari Age magazine that offered Quadrun by mail order



» [Virtual Boy] *Water World*: The waters ran red…

The pinball-themed *Sonic Spinball* was released on schedule, but when the boys returned to base, they found their *Spinny And Spike* project had been given to a new team and had been taken in a very different direction. Annoyed but too exhausted to fight their corner, the pair were much relieved to receive a call from Ocean of America offering them an appropriately liquid licence to work on: *Water World* for Nintendo's revolutionary new handheld, the Virtual Boy.

"I loved that machine," exclaims Steve. "It was awesome! It had two banks of 224 LEDs, one for each eye. It had these two rotating mirrors that took the sprayed photons from the LEDs and whacked them straight onto your retina! Your mind would triangulate these two images and make it 3D."

Steve describes the game, which has you protecting your Atollers from jet-ski riding baddies, as a 3D mash-up of *Asteroids* and *Rip-Off*, though sadly the title received a critical reception on par with that meted out to the movie. They also produced a Saturn version, which added a saw-blade weapon that allowed you to dice your foes in spectacular fashion, but when Infogrames bought out Ocean it shelved the project, despite the game being mastered and ready to go into production. Steve still has a copy, hidden in a dark store to hopefully prevent bit rot, though legal complications mean he's not sure what he could ever do with it.

> **"I was in heaven working on the Atari 2600. I wish it was still going on!"**
> Steve fondly remembers the old days

Trivia

Quadrun was one of only four games released through the Atari Club, available exclusively by mail order, though some copies may have made it onto shop shelves at a later date. If you've got one, lucky you.

The mid-Nineties saw Steve back with old buddies Franz Lanzinger and Eric Ginner, now at Actual Entertainment, working on the level architecture for *Gubble*, a re-imagining of *Crystal Castles*. The game was licensed for the PlayStation and since then Steve has also moved on to Sony consoles, including work on several iterations of the *Army Men* series. Do you still enjoy working on such big commercial projects, particularly when the games receive less than glowing reviews, Steve?

"It doesn't bother me," he replies. "It wasn't my vision! If I'd been the creative director, it might have hurt. I'm fine being asked to come in and help on a game. It's a tough adjustment to make to go from a one-man show to a million-man show and back around again, but I still want to work with groups of people. I'll do my games on my time…"

And true to his word, Steve has a sweet sideline producing casual games in Flash for the web and mobile devices. Visit his Tiny Games site (www.tinygames.com) and sample the addictive delights of *DunkIt* and *Findin' Stuff* – perfect time-killing fare when the boss isn't looking. So, is producing these one-man mouthfuls of fun a little like the old Atari days?

"When I'm actually sitting down and working on the game it really does," grins Steve. "I was in heaven working on the Atari 2600. Yeah, the hardware had limitations but it made you make a better game. I wish it was still going on!"

For Steve 'The Kid' Woita, it sort of is.



» [Mega Drive]: Flipping the hedgehog.

Steve Woita's

Desert Island Disks

The games that Steve Woita just couldn't live without and why he loves them

01


02


03


04


05


06


07


08


01 Paperboy – ARCADE

The first game my wife and I played together, in an arcade in a theatre. It was a lot of fun. I remember that moment; me showing her how to play it and her cracking up as she's learning and then getting really into it. Yeah, it was a date – a movie and an arcade! It was awesome!

02 Harbour Master – iPOD TOUCH

You draw a path of where your boat is going to go, it drops off its cargo and you gotta get it out of there, making sure no boat crashes with another. My wife currently holds the record of 135 and I'm trying to beat it. You should try it – I think you'll get hooked!

03 Sea Quest – VCS

I like the frantic, horizontal pattern stuff. Going around collecting oxygen as a diver and then deciding when to go up to the top and collect your bonus. It was really neat. You as the player have to decide whether to hang out at the top or go back into the action.

04 Atari Anthology – PS2

It encompasses all kinds of stuff. It's got lots of 2600 games and a lot of coin-op games that are emulated pretty well. I like the way *Red Baron* was tuned on that, and *Tempest* too.

05 Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance – PS2

I keep going back to it. I can't tell you how many times I've finished it. The way it feels, the way it's paced as you build up your character and how it gives you just enough options to diversify your character's abilities… there's just something about it.

06 Geometry Wars: Galaxies – NINTENDO DS

Don't get me wrong, I liked the Xbox versions, but I like all the added diversity they had with the different levels on the DS and how they tied your score to them. You kept trying to break your high score on each level.

07 Tempest – ARCADE

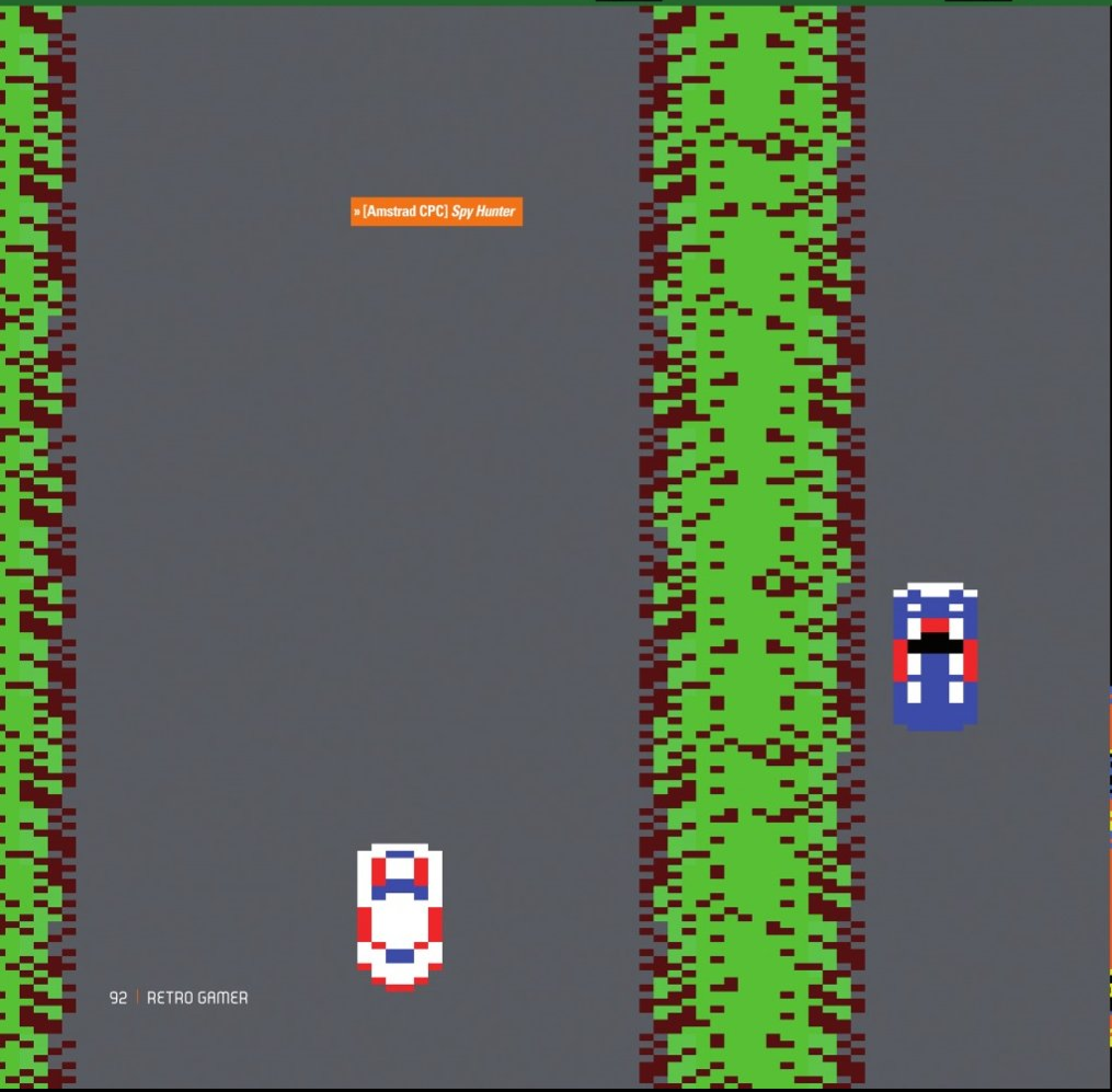
I remember playing *Tempest* a lot at Chuck-E-Cheese while I was at Apple, playing it with one hand and a slice of pizza in the other. The pizza and the game are just baked into my head. I looked forward to lunch so I could go and play it. I knew Dave Theurer from our time together at Tengen.

08 Zookeeper – ARCADE

When we were working at Atari on 2600 games in the 275 Gibraltar Building there was a little arcade in the building that was pitch black apart from the screens. *Zookeeper* and its sounds are etched into my head. I'd be working on a bug in *Quadrun* or *Taz* and I'd go and play it, trying to bunch all the critters together so I could do the ultimate jump over them.



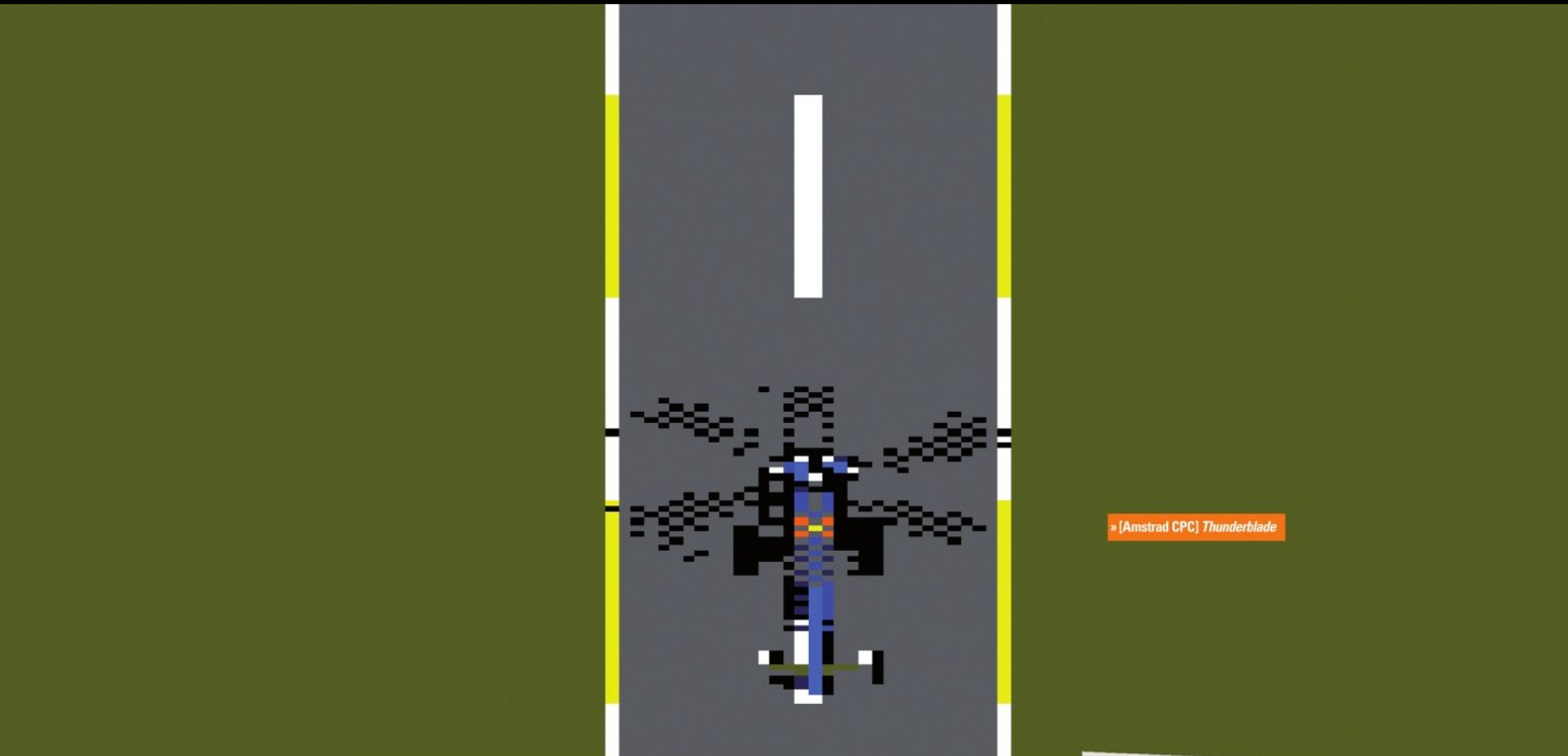
» [Amstrad CPC] *OutRun*



» [Amstrad CPC] *Spy Hunter*



» [Amstrad CPC] *Bionic Commando*



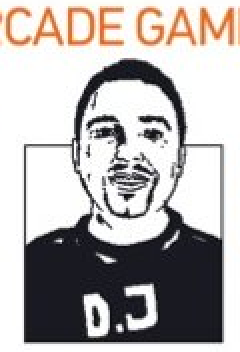
» [Amstrad CPC] *Thunderblade*

Coin-Op Hits



GREAT ARCADE GAMES DON'T MAKE A GREAT COMPILATION

» RETROREVIVAL



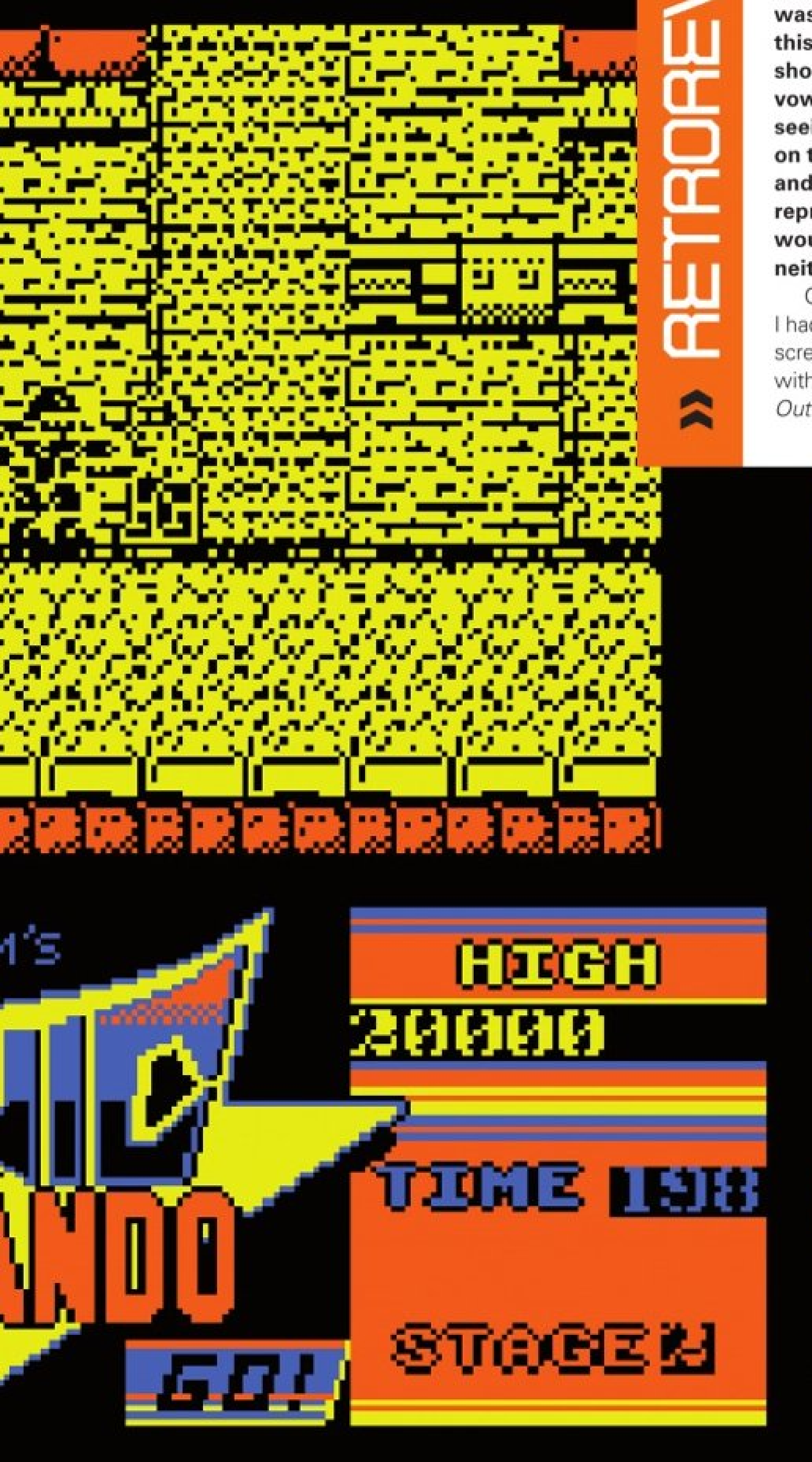
» AMSTRAD CPC
» US GOLD
» 1990

Oh, the pain. I can still remember picking up this compilation back in the day and being truly horrified by the fact that I had wasted £13 of my valuable Christmas money on this tatty compilation. Of course, in hindsight I should have known better. After all, I'd already vowed to never buy an arcade port again after seeing what US Gold did to my beloved *OutRun* on the Amstrad CPC, but here it was again, and with four other games, no less. Surely that represented good value for money? Surely it would be different this time? Unfortunately, neither was true.

Of course, the biggest problem here was that I had an Amstrad CPC 464, complete with green screen monitor, and none of the available conversions with the exception of *Spy Hunter* were much cop. *OutRun* was an absolute travesty of a conversion and easily one of the worst the CPC has ever seen, while *Thunder Blade* was further proof that my beloved Amstrad just wasn't capable of capturing Sega's cutting-edge arcade magic. *Bionic Commando* was a horrendous-looking port that was far prettier on the Speccy and C64, while *RoadBlasters* looked nice but lacked the insane thrills and spills of its arcade parent. That left the aforementioned *Spy Hunter*, a perfectly adequate conversion, but one that was leagues below its 8-bit brothers, at least in my eyes.

If I had been born under another sign and had received a Spectrum or, better yet, a Commodore 64, I'd have been perfectly happy spending that £13, as both machines had decent representations of the five games in this compilation in their software libraries. Sadly I didn't, and it's one of the only times – aside from playing the awesome *Armalyte* and *Io* – that I actually wished that my nan had bought me a C64 instead of my CPC 464.

While alternate versions of these games do exist, I thought I'd just show you the Amstrad versions so that if you can't feel my pain, you can at least see it. *





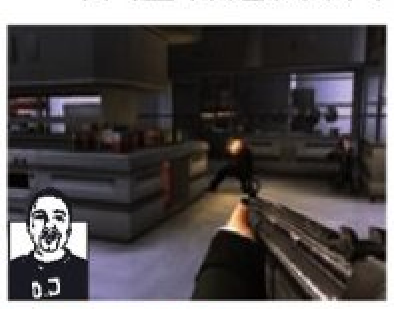
» [Amstrad CPC] *Roadblasters*

RETRORATED



>> There was always going to be a lot of games with Christmas around the corner, but we're still amazed by the sheer number of titles that we're desperate to play. So cast your eyes over the following five pages and start making that Christmas list.

PICKS OF THE MONTH



DARRAN
GoldenEye 007
It's not perfect, but it does invoke all those memories of playing the original N64 game.



STUART
GoldenEye 007
A great game to play in the office, especially as I beat Darran all the time.



DAVID
GoldenEye 007
The excellent multiplayer suite in this game makes it feel like it's 1997 again.

>> GOLDENEYE 007

INFORMATION

- **FEATURED SYSTEM:** WII
- **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** DS
- **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- **PRICE:** £34.99
- **PUBLISHER:** ACTIVISION
- **DEVELOPER:** EUROCOM
- **PLAYERS:** 1 (1-8 ONLINE)

BRIEF HISTORY

» James Bond is no stranger to the world of videogames, with his first adventure being on the Atari 2600 in 1983. Since then he's been in over 20 games, including Rare's astonishingly good *GoldenEye 007*. In addition to this, Activision has also recently released *Blood Stone*, a racing/shooter hybrid by Bizarre Creations.

WHY NOT TRY

▼ SOMETHING OLD
GOLDENEYE 007 (N64)



▽ SOMETHING NEW
007: BLOOD STONE (PS3)



GoldenEye 007

EUROCOM ATTEMPTS TO BEAT RARE AT ITS OWN GAME



You have to hand it to Eurocom; it's certainly not afraid of a challenge. The Derby-based developer has been given the unenviable task of recapturing the magic of Rare's incredibly accomplished N64 first-person shooter, *GoldenEye 007*, and, as a result, finds itself in something of a predicament. After all, do you shamelessly attempt to remake the original game scene for scene, or do you simply make your own game and hope that it ends up better than the awful *GoldenEye: Rogue Agent*?

Eurocom has opted for the latter and while it, if we're truly honest, was never going to be as good as Rare's 1997 effort, we're still pleasantly surprised by just how good *GoldenEye 007* actually is.

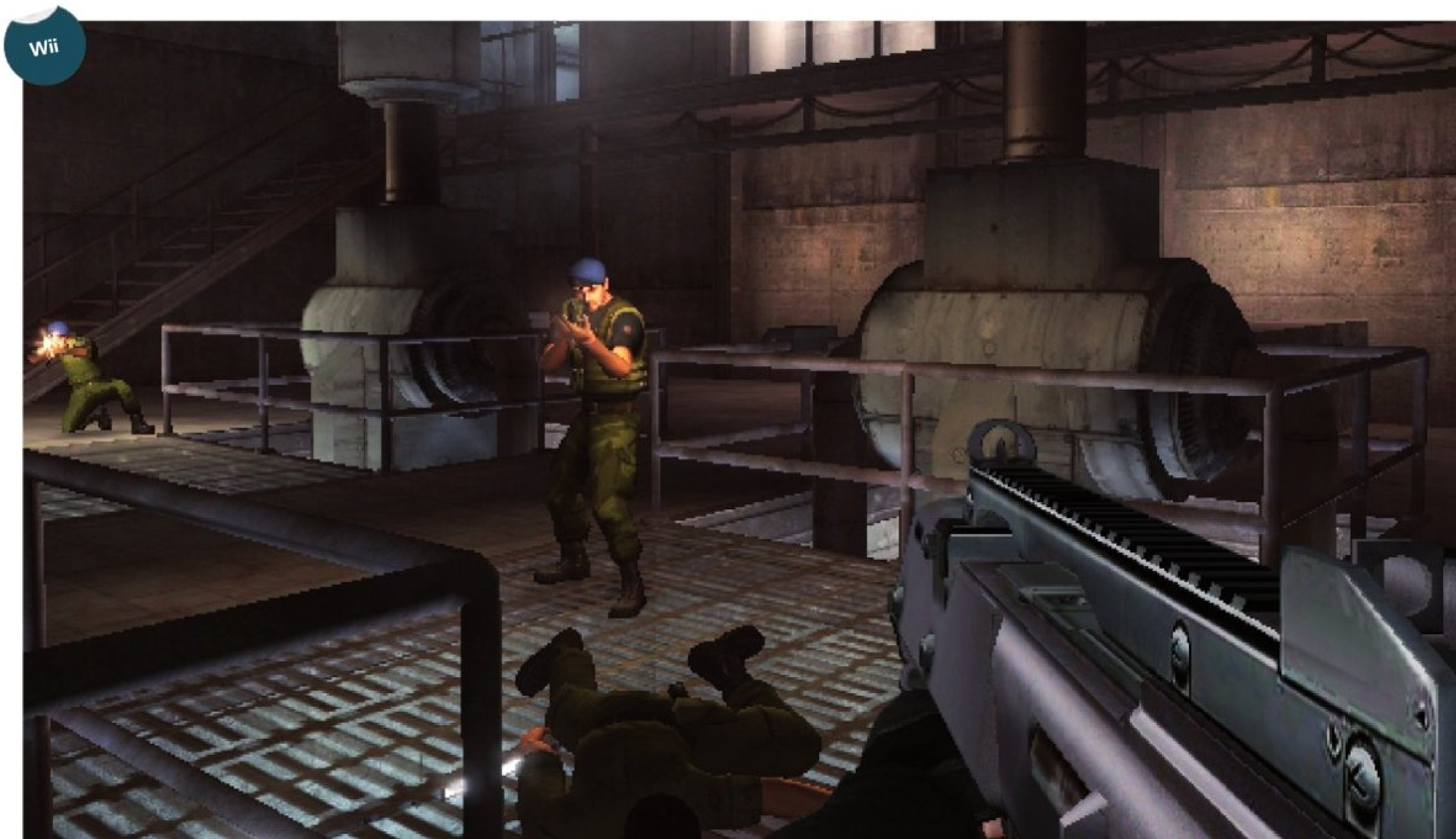
Rather than try to replicate the success of Rare's N64 game, Eurocom simply returns to the drawing board and delivers an entertaining first-person shooter that borrows heavily from Activision's *Call Of Duty* franchise. If this sounds like a recipe for disaster then don't worry, because it really isn't. Yes, there are more dynamic set pieces on offer and yes, it features the same snap-on firing system, but it actually





» [Wii] There are plenty of elements in the game that instantly remind you of the N64 classic. Here's the dam level, for example.

Wii





» [Wii] The tank section is great fun, easily erasing the rubbish version that existed on the N64.

feels far more cinematic as a result, and let's not forget that the original *GoldenEye* was first and foremost a movie licence.

It's also obvious that, while Eurocom is intent on stamping its own mark on the licence, it's not afraid to doff its cap to some of the first game's more memorable moments. The opening dam approach is still there and the tank stage returns in greatly improved form, while escaping from the train and racing through the bunker are just a few of the treats to look out for. In some cases they are totally different, like the train is no longer in motion and Bond doesn't escape using his laser watch, but – and this is the important bit – they still feel like the original game.

This feeling is further accentuated by the inclusion of various difficulty modes that require you to do a number of additional tasks to complement your main mission. Then there's the graphical style to consider, which again, is new but eerily echoes moments and levels from the original game. The included control setups are also very good, and while the Classic Controller option is by far our favourite, it's perfectly playable using the standard Wii Remote/ Nunchuck setup.

Although the single-player game is good, it's the excellent multiplayer that really makes this feel like a proper *GoldenEye* game. While we've been unable to play the online game, which is basically *Call Of Duty* in all but name, the local multiplayer game is tremendous fun, effortlessly recapturing the manic gunplay of 1997. It's disappointing that none of the original levels made the cut – stages like Facility and Archives exist in name only – but the new maps are perfectly designed and a hell of a lot of fun to play through.

If you're looking for a remake of Rare's original classic, you certainly won't find it here. The structure is completely different, the levels feel a little too long, many of the cut-scenes seem superfluous, and you can dual-wield guns, which is all sorts of wrong. What you will discover, though, is a truly entertaining first-person shooter that does both James Bond and the *GoldenEye* name proud. And that's more than good enough for us.

OPINION



Yes, it was never going to top the original game, but Eurocom comes pretty close. The multiplayer is tremendous fun, easily capturing the fun of the original, while even the single-player game is enjoyable. A very pleasant surprise.

Stuart Hunt

In a nutshell

Eurocom handles a potentially poisoned chalice with aplomb and delivers a great new *Bond* game that does the original proud while retaining the magic that made *GoldenEye*'s multiplayer such a joy to play. Impressive.

>> Scores

Presentation	70%
Graphics	88%
Sound	75%
Playability	82%
Addictivity	89%
Overall	**85%**

✱ VIRTUAL ROUND-UP

>> There's no better medium to find all your favourite retro games than the various download services. Here are this month's new additions

VIRTUAL CONSOLE

Nintendo once again focuses on WiiWare and DSiWare, leaving retro fans with just two games to choose from. *Super EDF* is a rather bland SNES shooter from the long-running bug-killing series, while *Street Hoop* plays a decent game of basketball. The Virtual Console has been in the doldrums for a while now and there seems no sign of any immediate change, which we could understand if there weren't any more games worth releasing.

Super EDF: Earth Defense Force
» **System:** SNES
» **Price:** 800 Points (£5.60)
» **Rating:** ★★☆☆☆

Street Hoop
» **System:** Neo Geo
» **Price:** 900 Points (£6.30)
» **Rating:** ★★★☆☆

PC

While it's been quiet on the Steam front, Good Old Games continues to pillage the Hasbro/Atari archives and has unleashed even more classic *Dungeons & Dragons* role-playing goodness, including some bona fide classics from Black Isle Studios. There's a seven-game deal in place, so we're guessing that *Baldur's Gate II* isn't too far away.

The Temple Of Elemental Evil
» **Service:** GOG
» **Price:** $5.99
» **Rating:** ★★★☆☆

Age Of Wonders: Shadow Magic
» **Service:** GOG
» **Price:** $9.99
» **Rating:** ★★★☆☆

Neverwinter Nights: Diamond Edition
» **Service:** GOG
» **Price:** $9.99
» **Rating:** ★★★★☆

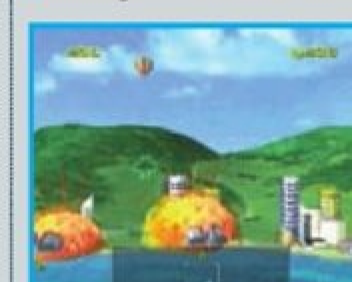
Age Of Wonders II: The Wizard's Throne
» **Service:** GOG
» **Price:** $9.99
» **Rating:** ★★★☆☆

Icewind Dale II
» **Service:** GOG
» **Price:** $9.99
» **Rating:** ★★★★☆

PLAYSTATION NETWORK

Typical, isn't it? You wait absolutely ages for an Atari arcade game to appear on PSN then three come along at once. Admittedly it would be better to have games that play more to the PlayStation's strengths, but the new versions of all three titles are pretty good (if you have incredibly low standards), and considering the amount of stuff that hasn't been appearing, we'll happily take anything. At the moment.

Centipede
» **System:** PlayStation
» **Price:** £3.99
» **Rating:** ★★☆☆☆



Missile Command
» **System:** PlayStation
» **Price:** £3.99
» **Rating:** ★★☆☆☆
» *Missile Command* goes 3D. Sadly, it's not as exciting as it sounds and the end result is a rather bland shooter that fails to do the original arcade game justice. Fiddly to control and with clunky gameplay, only hardcore *Missile Command* fans are likely to get any interest out of it.

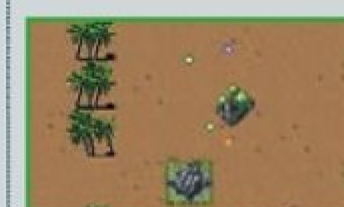
Pong
» **System:** PlayStation
» **Price:** £3.99
» **Rating:** ★★★☆☆

GAME ROOM

We don't really like to complain about Game Room, seeing that Krome is sadly no more, but there's no denying that this is a dark period for the digital download service. Microsoft has been so far unwilling to mention who, if anyone, will be taking over stewardship of the project now that Krome is no more, so we'll just have to wait and see what happens. Hopefully something good is going to come out of all this. Hopefully...

✱ All games are 240 Points

Breakout
» **System:** Atari 2600
» **Rating:** ★☆☆☆☆



Jackal
» **System:** Arcade
» **Rating:** ★★★☆☆
» Yay! After weeks of nothing we get a meaty arcade game to sink our teeth into. Despite having to get used to the controls again – mastering the bomb is a pain – *Jackal* is a great scrolling shooter and marks a move to newer (ish) games for Microsoft's online service. We still need more publishers on board, though.

Double Dunk
» **System:** Atari 2600
» **Rating:** ★☆☆☆☆

Kabobber
» **System:** Atari 2600
» **Rating:** ★☆☆☆☆

Space Cadet
» **System:** Intellivision
» **Rating:** ★☆☆☆☆

Space War
» **System:** Atari 2600
» **Rating:** ★☆☆☆☆

Sprint Master
» **System:** Atari 2600
» **Rating:** ★☆☆☆☆

Golf
» **System:** Atari 2600
» **Rating:** ★☆☆☆☆

Human Cannonball
» **System:** Atari 2600
» **Rating:** ★☆☆☆☆

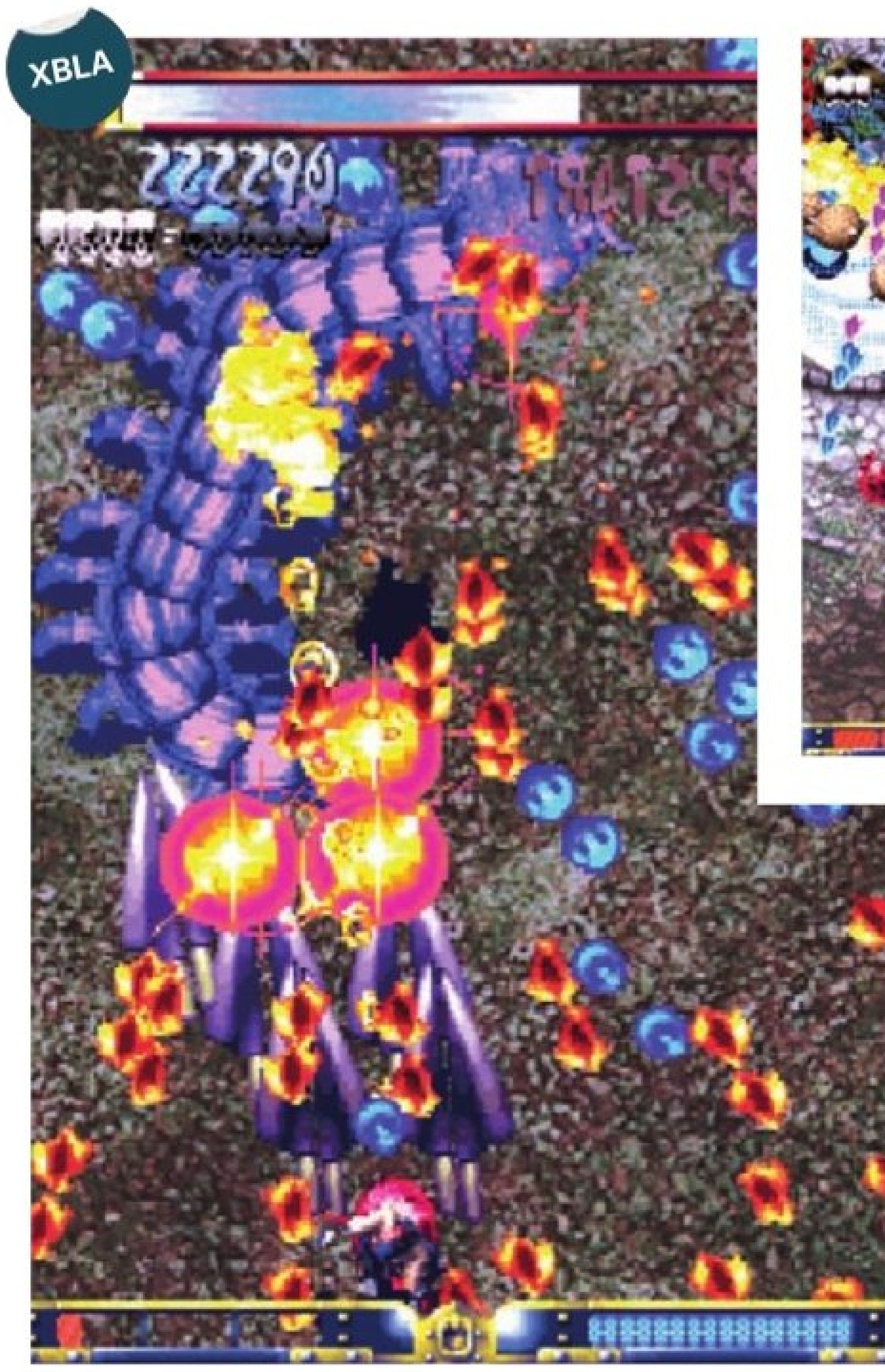
Miniature Golf
» **System:** Atari 2600
» **Rating:** ★☆☆☆☆

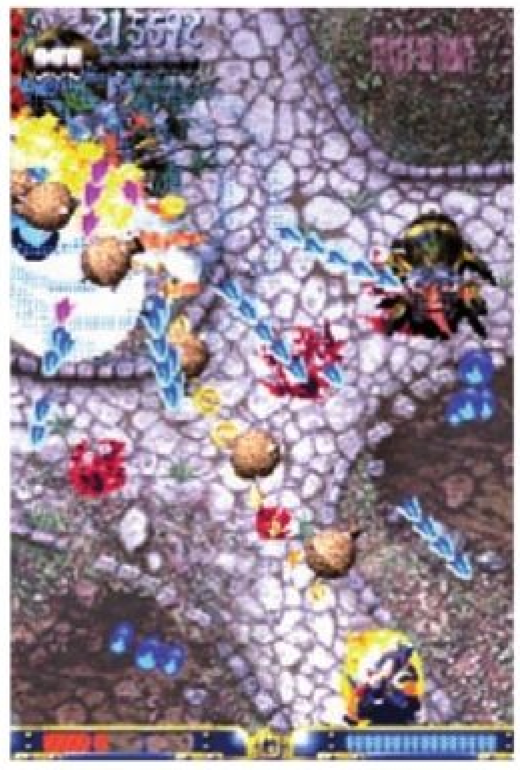
Super Football
» **System:** Atari 2600
» **Rating:** ★☆☆☆☆

Skiing
» **System:** Intellivision
» **Rating:** ★☆☆☆☆

Space Battle
» **System:** Atari 2600
» **Rating:** ★☆☆☆☆

XBLA





» [XBLA] *Guwange* is more evidence of Cave's mastery of the genre.

Guwange

» **FEATURED SYSTEM:** XBOX LIVE ARCADE » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** N/A » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
» **PRICE:** 800 POINTS (£6.80) » **PUBLISHER:** CAVE » **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE » **PLAYERS:** 1-2



Cave continues its assault on the Xbox 360 with a fantastic port of its revered 1999 arcade game. The story itself is suitably nuts, involving ancient spirits and freeing a malevolent god. Worry not, though, for the strength of *Guwange* isn't its crazy plot, but its beautifully crafted gameplay, which once again proves why Cave is a master of the genre.

As with many of Cave's shooters, the mechanics are far from simple and will require plenty of mastery before you feel confident with them. In addition to a bomb attack that will destroy any bullets it touches, the main focus of *Guwange*'s mechanics revolve around the shikigamis that fight alongside the three available characters. These can be sent out into enemy throngs and will immediately slow down any projectiles that pass through them. They can also fire in an independent direction to your main character and will turn any bullets caught in explosions into coins.

It sounds hectic and initially it is, but well-designed levels and addictive gameplay ensure that you'll constantly return for one more go, which is a key component of any decent shooter. Being Cave's first Xbox Live Arcade release after a handful of Xbox 360 retail games, it doesn't boast the presentation or options of its boxed peers, but it's nevertheless a wonderful shooter that easily justifies its ridiculously low asking price.

OPINION



Hooray! It's another great Cave shooter. Previously I've only been able to witness *Guwange* on MAME, so it's great to have a legit copy at last. Wildly inventive and with a clever scoring system, it's a great shooter that will hopefully find a new audience on Live Arcade.

Darran Jones

>> Scores

Presentation	**72%**
Graphics	**85%**
Sound	**90%**
Playability	**94%**
Addictivity	**92%**

Overall 93%

PS3



The Sims 3

» **SYSTEM:** PS3
» **PRICE:** £49.99 » **PLAYERS:** 1

>> **If you're looking** for an in-depth experience akin to the PC outing then prepare for disappointment. Fortunately, while the console version of *The Sims 3* is rather lacking in depth – although the available challenges are good fun – it remains the best home version we've played thanks to the inclusion of new karma powers, which allow us to be particularly evil, and an extremely slick interface. Yes, it's rather basic compared to the PC game, but it remains a strong addition to the popular franchise.

>> Score **78%**

XBLA



The King Of Fighters 2002: Unlimited Match

» **SYSTEM:** XBOX LIVE ARCADE
» **PRICE:** 800 POINTS (£6.80) » **PLAYERS:** 1-2

>> **After being crushingly** disappointed by *King Of Fighters XII*, we're delighted to report that this is a fantastic return to form. There's a huge roster of characters to choose from, the online play is surprisingly lag-free, and SNK Playmore has even included some decent filters that don't make it look like a five-year-old's art project. It's not up to *Garou* standards, of course, but this remains an essential brawler at a great price.

>> Score **85%**

XBLA



Haunted House

» **SYSTEM:** XBOX LIVE ARCADE
» **PRICE:** 800 POINTS (£6.80) » **PLAYERS:** 1

>> **Atari's remake of** the popular 2600 hit is perfect proof that some games are best left in the past. The original 2600 game was a surprisingly creepy experience, but this new offering is about as scary as an episode of *Scooby-Doo*. Gameplay is also rather bland, with the need to search random furniture soon becoming extremely monotonous. Stick with the original, because although it lacks the current-gen graphical polish of this version, it's much more fun.

>> Score **45%**

XBLA

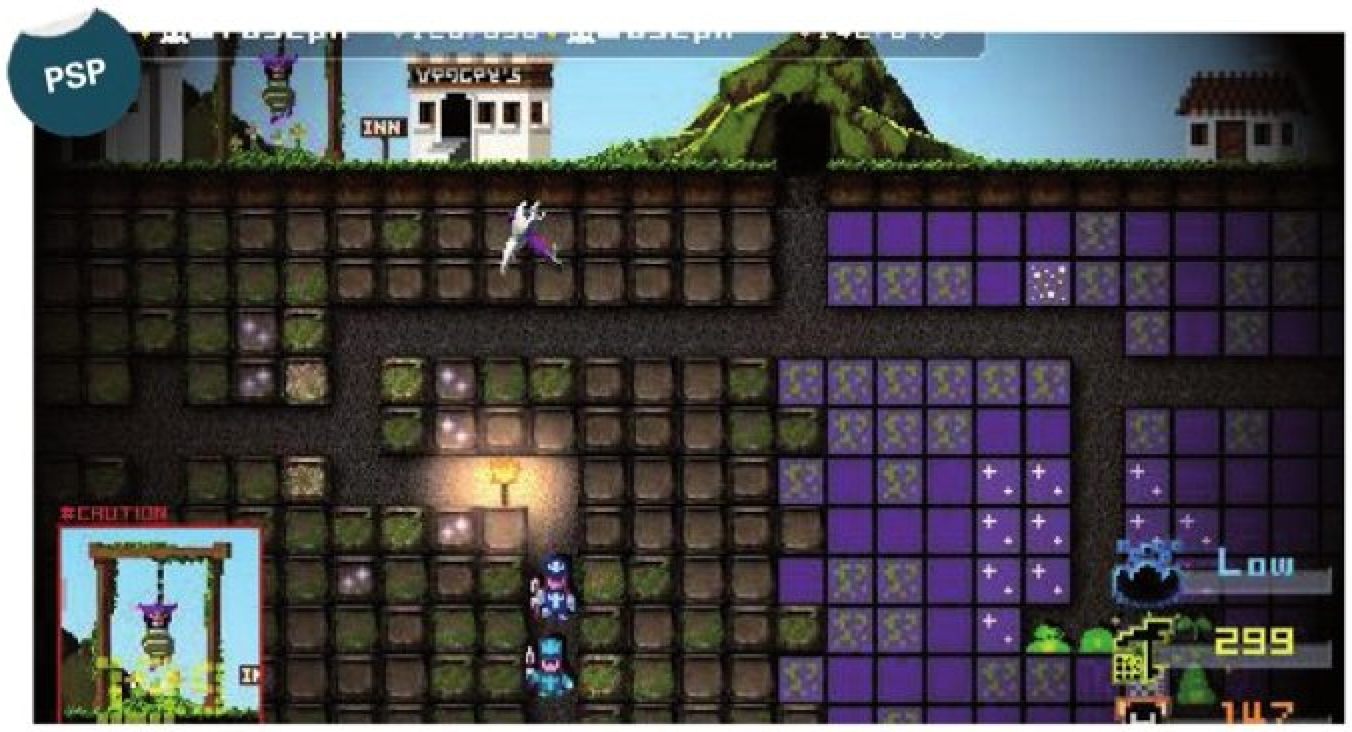


Pinball FX 2

» **SYSTEM:** XBOX LIVE ARCADE
» **PRICE:** 800 POINTS (£6.80) » **PLAYERS:** 1-4

>> **This truly superb** follow-up is now officially our favourite video pinball game. The four included tables are exceptionally polished and will take an age to master, while it's also possible to import all your previous tables from the first game if you were partial to a bit of that. Best of all, though, is the superb new split-screen mode and the new online structure that delivers a fantastic community spirit that pinball fans owe it to themselves to experience. Download this immediately.

>> Score **91%**



No Heroes Allowed!

» **SYSTEM:** PSP » **PRICE:** £9.99 » **PLAYERS:** 1-2

>> **The third game** in the *Badman* trilogy returns with a new name and plenty of new features. The most notable difference is the addition of a two-player mode, but the ability to evolve new breeds of monsters, choose from different pick-axes, and fill dungeons with water also make a huge difference to the core gameplay. Graphically it still looks wonderful, with its 8-bit-styled visuals, while the script continues to boast lots of nods to other games. Although the core gameplay does feel a little too familiar for its own good, the new elements that Acquire has included ensure that we'll be looking forward to a fourth part in the series. Here's hoping the fact that it's only being given a digital release doesn't hamper its success.

>> Score **80%**

ZX Spectrum Elite Collection Vol 1

» **SYSTEM:** IPHONE » **PRICE:** £0.59 » **PLAYERS:** 1



>> **Well this is** a mixed bag. Elite has revisited some of its greatest games, including a few from other studios, and delivered six fantastic titles for just 59p. Presentation is beautiful, the app cleverly passing over needless instructions that appeared in the original games, and each appears perfectly emulated.

The six included games are also of a very high standard, consisting of *Saboteur!*, *Buggy Boy*, *Chuckie Egg*, *Turbo Esprit*, *Frank Bruno's Boxing* and *Harrier Attack*. It's a nice range of genres that ensures plenty of variety. What a pity, then, that the controls let so many of them down. As a result, while fans will get a lot out of it, anyone else will wonder what the fuss was all about. Pity.

>> Score **62%**





» [iPhone] Achieve success and this humble base gives way to modern offices.



OPINION

I love the cute pixel art, the simulation is wonderfully compelling, and there are lots of clever, knowing and funny nods to the industry. A truly amazing simulator and easily one of the best examples of the genre on Apple's machine.

Stuart Hunt

Game Dev Story

» **FEATURED SYSTEM:** IPHONE » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** N/A » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
» **PRICE:** £2.39 » **PUBLISHER:** KAIROSOFT » **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE » **PLAYERS:** 1



If you buy one iPhone game this month then please make sure you pick this one up, as it's an amazing piece of work. At its most basic, *Game Dev Story* is little more than a *Theme Park* clone, but instead of managing a bustling amusement park you're instead in charge of a new game development company. It's a fantastic idea and we're quite frankly astounded that we've never seen this done by anyone before.

Starting off with a small amount of cash and a tiny team, you'll have to work incredibly hard in order to create a monster hit that will ensure your success and growing fan following for years to come. Development staff can be hired and trained, new genres of games are unlocked, and you can choose between safe contracting work and riskier but far more profitable games. Cheekily following gaming's history, you'll have the option to work on everything from the Virtual Boy to the PlayStation 2 – with new names, of course – and have an impressive number of options to choose from as you aim for videogame stardom.

Beautifully crafted thanks to its gorgeous pixel art and worryingly addictive to play, *Game Dev Story* is a title that every iPhone owner needs to own. It's an astonishing little strategy game that plays out as both a love story to the genre and the videogame industry in general. A marvellous piece of work.

>> Scores

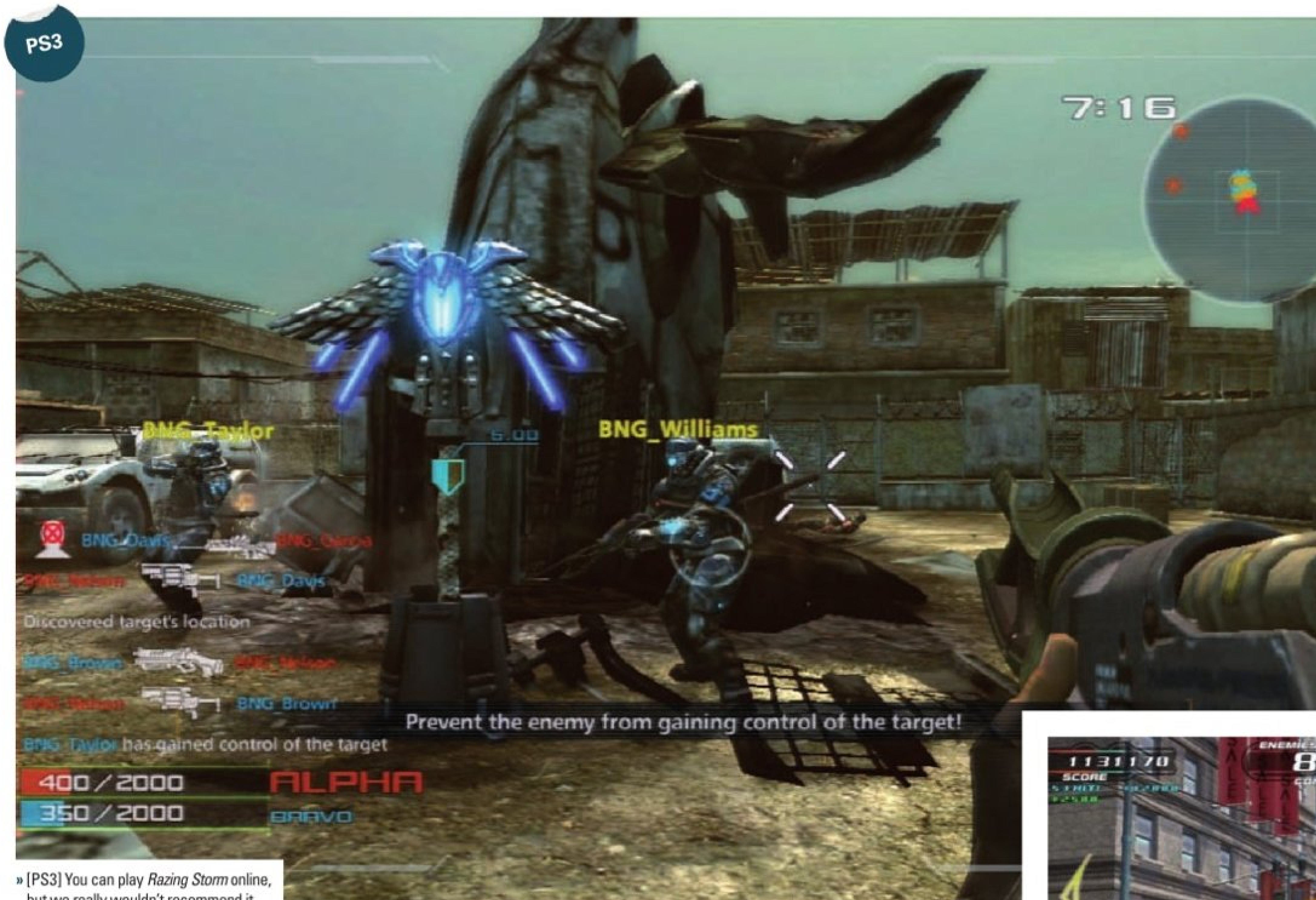
Presentation	68%
Graphics	88%
Sound	55%
Playability	96%
Addictivity	97%

Overall 96%

RETRORATED

>> TIME CRISIS: RAZING STORM

PS3



» [PS3] You can play *Razing Storm* online, but we really wouldn't recommend it.



✱ GO DEEPER

The facts behind Time Crisis

>> Namco is well known for lightgun games, having released *Point Blank, Ninja Assault* and *Vampire Night*, in addition to the *Time Crisis* games

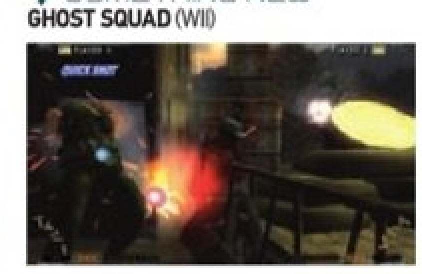
>> *Razing Storm* follows on from the PlayStation's *Project Titan*, which itself was a sequel to *Crisis Zone*.

✱WHY NOT TRY

▼ SOMETHING OLD
TIME CRISIS (PLAYSTATION)



▽ SOMETHING NEW
GHOST SQUAD (WII)



FOUR GAMES FOR THE PRICE OF ONE

Time Crisis: Razing Storm



After recently hammering Sega's *Gunblade NY*, we've been able to get our itchy trigger fingers on another fun lightgun compilation. This time, though, it's not the Wii that's being put through its paces, but Sony's PS3, as *Time Crisis: Razing Storm* represents the first lightgun game on the system to make use of Sony's new Move peripheral.

Like the Wii Remote, Move proves to be perfect for lightgun titles, and while awkward button placements make a few games in the compilation tougher to play (if you're using the plastic gun holder) you'll be impressed by just how accurate the device is. You'll also be pleased with the amount of content that has been crammed into this pack. Oh, and if you don't want to invest in Move, it works perfectly with the GunCon 3 as well.

Time Crisis: Razing Storm is the big hitter, and while it plays very differently to other games in the series – you're constantly assaulted by masses of enemies instead of fewer, more strategic foes – it's an incredible, adrenaline-fuelled experience with exciting set pieces and challenging boss fights. It also comes with a story mode, which is effectively a brand new game in itself. Sadly, this new mode is a complete mess, playing like the *Resident Evil: Dead Aim* games but with even poorer and more twitchy controls.

Fortunately, *Razing Storm*'s arcade mode remains incredibly strong, and the pack is bolstered by the inclusion of *Time Crisis 4* and the truly spectacular *Deadstorm Pirates*.

Time Crisis 4 delivers the traditional cover system that the series has employed over the years – *Razing Storm* opts for a shield to hide behind instead – and lets you choose between four core weapons. It also features several sections that see you constantly switching direction in order to fend off hordes of enemies.

Deadstorm Pirates, on the other hand, is arguably the most simplistic game in the collection, with one weapon, a single power-up and no need to ever reload. Despite this, it's the most fun because of the sheer number of undead monstrosities that are constantly thrown at you.

If you're looking for longevity, prepare for disappointment. If, however, you're after some good old-fashioned blasting, you will not be disappointed.

INFORMATION

- » **FEATURED SYSTEM:** PS3
- » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** N/A
- » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- » **PRICE:** £34.99
- » **PUBLISHER:** SONY
- » **DEVELOPER:** NAMCO
- » **PLAYERS:** 1-2

BRIEF HISTORY

» *Time Crisis* was first released in Japanese arcades in 1995, but quickly became a huge success story on Sony's PlayStation when it was released two years later. Famed for its unique cover system – a first for the genre – it has gone on to spawn three sequels and three spin-offs including *Razing Storm* and *Crisis Zone*.

OPINION



Move is more than suitable for lightgun games, but the decision to turn the series into a first-person shooter is misguided. Fortunately the lightgun games are great fun and make this well worth the price. A great compilation, even if it lacks the longevity of its peers.

Stuart Hunt

In a nutshell

Yes, *Razing Storm*'s story mode is dire, but the rest of this pack delivers an amazing arcade experience that no lightgun fan will want to miss out on.

>> Scores

Presentation	70%
Graphics	80%
Sound	68%
Playability	90%
Addictivity	82%
Overall	**84%**

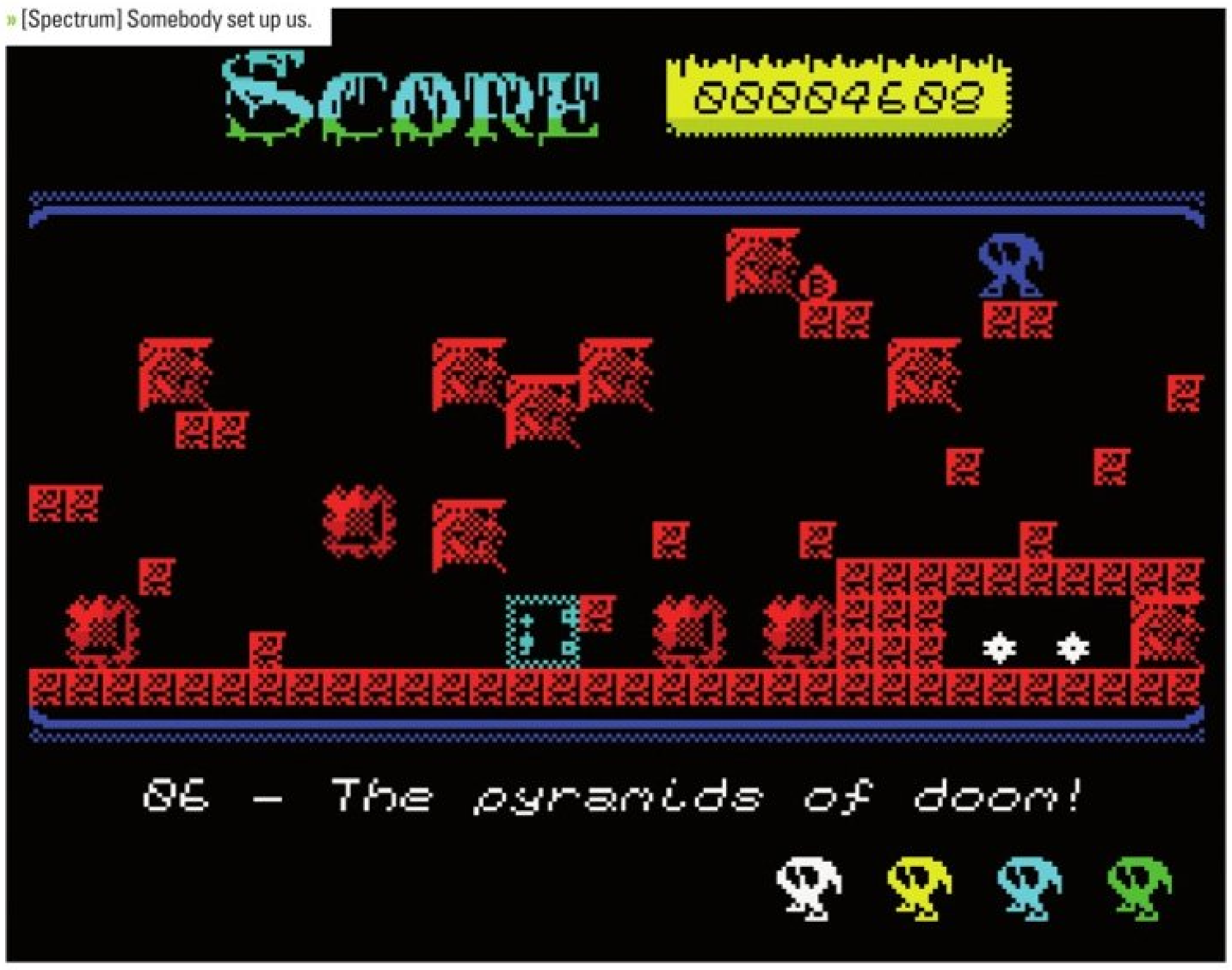
HOMEBREW

>> The scene's latest news and reviews

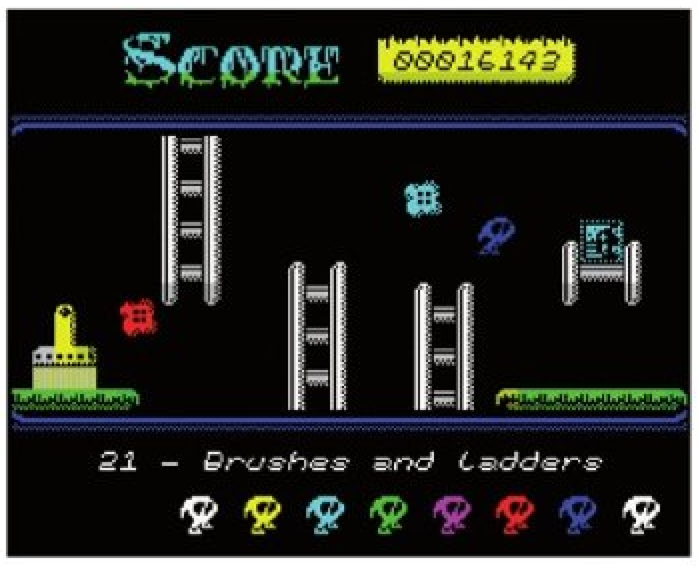


There have been a few cease and desist orders sent out to developers of late, with the chap behind OpenCarmageddon being the latest recipient. While the holders of copyrights have every right to enforce that ownership, the method that most companies choose to handle this doesn't do them many favours – surely working with the remakers would be better PR than shutting them down?

» [Spectrum] Somebody set up us.







HORACE IN THE MYSTIC WOODS

IF YOU GO DOWN TO THE WOODS TODAY...



» **FORMAT:** SINCLAIR SPECTRUM
» **DEVELOPED BY:** BOB SMITH
» **LINK:** HTTP://KIKSTART.EU/HORACE
» **RELEASE DATE:** 2010
» **PRICE:** FREE

Despite nobody being entirely sure which species Horace actually is, he's always been something of a Spectrum superstar, appearing in three games that each explored a different genre.

But the game we're currently concerned with is the fourth released instalment of the *Horace* saga, one that didn't appear on the Spectrum but was instead published by original developer Psion for its Series 3 palmtop computers. And, since we're talking about a game that was originally released in 1995, this story could well have ended at that point had developer Michael Ware – who we interviewed back in issue 72 around the time he released *Manic Miner - The Lost Levels* and *Warhawk DS* – not had the foresight to preserve his source code and graphics for *Mystic Woods*, just in case they came in handy.

Which they did, because not long ago Z80 artist Bob Smith decided it was time that somebody sat down with Michael's materials and returned the little 'chap' to his spiritual home on the Spectrum.

So Horace is indeed back as his usual charming self and, depending on which version of the game is selected from the archive, comes in a range of colours because fans at World of Spectrum couldn't decide which one he should be. One thing that has always distinguished the *Horace* series is that they don't share a common design – each one is different even to the point of changing the lead character's colour.

Horace In The Mystic Woods continues that trend, taking the majority of its cues from Eighties Spectrum platforming classics such as *Manic Miner* and the *Monty Moles*, so there's an abundance of pixel-perfect jumping action, a collection of curious assailants and a slightly twisted sense of humour that occasionally leads to a truly evil instant death. One particular situation sees poor Horace plunge to his doom having collected a bomb icon that removes the floor he's walking over – it's hard to decide if that's a reason to chuckle or scream obscenities!

So there are some quirks to the *Mystic Woods*, along with the inertia on the movement controls that makes pixel-perfect jumping trickier than usual, the overall difficulty level is right up there with games like *Monty On The Run* for sheer banging-head-against-screen frustration, but it does at least offer an option from the title page to continue from the last level reached so that game can be walked away from while some Ibuprofen is sought.

The sound is all beeper-based for that authentic atmosphere, so there are a few reasonable in-game effects, a piercing sampled scream on death and some excellent Dr Beep tunes for almost everything else. Generally speaking, the graphics are a little more detailed and colourful than the previous *Horace* titles, with only a smidgeon of clash here and there. Players of an easily frustrated disposition are advised to play in small doses and rely on the continue feature but, difficulty aside, this is a worthy addition to the *Horace* family tree.

92%



» [Spectrum] The spiders are back.



» [Spectrum] Leg it!

NEW GAMES NEEDED

If you have a homebrew project you would like to see featured then please contact us at:
retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk

MINESTORM

» **FORMAT:** COMMODORE 64 » **DEVELOPER:** TRISTAR AND RED SECTOR INC » **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/MINESTORM » **PRICE:** FREE

The original *Minestorm* was built into the Vectrex, and quite a few gamers feel it's the primary reason to own that vector-based games system. And, as with the previous TRSI Vectrex conversions of *Castle Of Narzod* and *Spike*, this C64 version of *Minestorm* gets remarkably close to the original game's wireframe stylings.

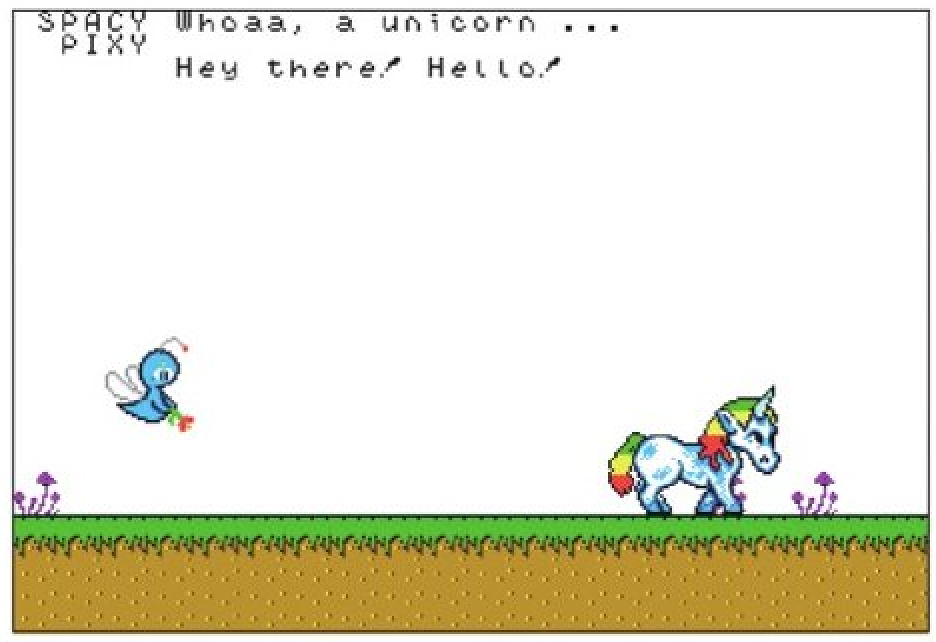
Each stage begins with a mothership trudging 'into' the screen, seeding the play area with dormant mines and, once the player's ship is in place, some of them will activate and need avoiding or shooting. On the early levels mines will move like asteroids, drifting around the screen and wrapping around at the edges, but it doesn't take long for homing mines to appear.

Everything from the aggressive thrusting of the original game is present and correct, which makes manoeuvring safely quite difficult and the nastier variations of mine will fire parting shots when destroyed. Although it's not a 100 per cent perfect conversion, *Minestorm* on the C64 is as close as possible to the original.

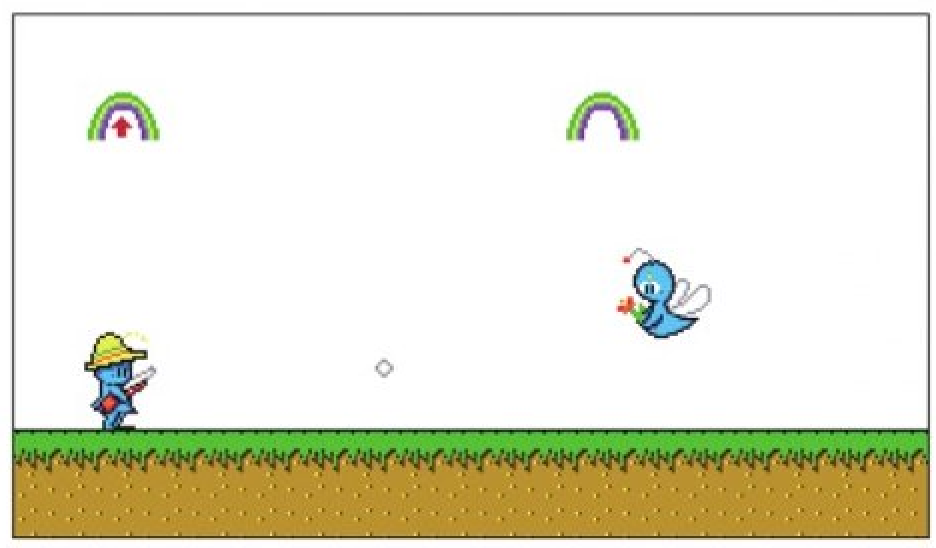
86%

» [C64] Keep your galaxy tidy.





» [Mega Drive] A horse with an ice cream on its nose!



SPACE PIXY

» **FORMAT:** SEGA MEGA DRIVE » **DEVELOPER:** CABBAGE, ONIONZOO AND SARANG » **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/PIXY » **PRICE:** FREE

The last thing that a lonely Space Pixy needs is, while exploring the world he's been stranded on, is a fungal growth vying for his attention. It seems the balance of nature has been thrown into disarray and there are only mushrooms as far as the eye can see. The Space Pixy, 'armed' with the magical flower the mushroom gives him, heads off to investigate further and meets a unicorn…

The issue with *Space Pixy* – unless you count the bizarre storyline and unskippable dialogue scenes – is that there isn't much to it; the action settles into a cycle of avoiding the angry farmer's bullets, collecting a quota of mushrooms, grabbing a unicorn horn, then rinse and repeat until the exit opens. Players who persevere and grind through all of the mushroom picking will at least be treated to a happy ending.

58%

CHERIL OF THE BOSQUE

» **FORMAT:** AMSTRAD CPC » **DEVELOPER:** THE MOJON TWINS » **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/CHERIL » **PRICE:** FREE



» [Amstrad CPC] Grab a frog for bonus energy.

Cheril of the Bosque is leaving home, tempted away by the glamour of the city and being able to go for a stroll without a snake jumping out from behind a bush. The journey she's about to undertake is a demanding one, but she's done the maths and is foraging for the 13 gigantic nuts that will be sufficient sustenance.

Holding down a control sees Cheril accelerating, and releasing it allows friction to gently decelerate her to a stop – an unusual system for a maze-based game and it does make manoeuvring a little tricky and the inertia can sometimes result in the poor lass ricocheting back and forth between hazards like a pinball.

Quirky controls and slightly overzealous collisions aside, *Cheril Of The Bosque* isn't a particularly hard game, so most players will probably see the rather revealing completion screen after a couple of sessions.

83%

WHAT'S BREWING?

All the latest news from the homebrew community



» [NES] Who you gonna call? *Blade Buster*!

>> What's the score?

Blade Buster is a brand new NES shoot-'em-up, based on a 'score attack" game mechanic; the player is handed the keys to their spaceship and challenged to rack up as high a score as possible during either a two or five minute user-selectable time limit. Two minutes might not sound long, but when the action is as frantic as it gets here it can seem much longer! **http://kikstart.eu/bladebuster.**



» [C64] Took his time getting here!

>> The eyes have it

Hawkeye 2 for the C64 is a sequel that has been over two decades in the making, but a preview was released at the X'2010 party held during October. Although it was originally based on source code supplied by original *Hawkeye* developer Mario van Zeist, *Hawkeye 2* has been extensively reprogrammed and it knocks the original into a cocked hat – have a look at **http://kikstart.eu/hawkeye2.**



» [Spectrum] Lacking just a little pace in text form.

>> Just a-maze-ing

And to finish, probably the most ridiculous game idea we've come across this month or possibly even for the entire year has to be *Pac-Txt*, a Spectrum conversion of the web-based *Pac-Man* text adventure. Let's just pause a moment to savour that concept shall we? *Pac-Man*. As a text adventure. Take a look at **http://kikstart.eu/pac-txt** if you feel that typing "eat dot" repeatedly sounds like your idea of entertainment!

HOMEBREW

>> The scene's latest news and reviews

WHAT'S BREWING?

All the latest news from the homebrew community



>> Not asking for directions

Originally titled OpenCarmageddon until rights holder Square Enix got in touch and attempted to can the entire project, *Cartastrophe* is a remake of Stainless Games' hybrid of racing and killing. Owners of the original will be able to feed *Cartastrophe* the data from the CD to play something that looks and sounds like the original, but will run on their new Windows-based machine. The ongoing blog is hiding behind **http://kikstart.eu/cartastrophe**.



>> Is it a bird? Is it a plane?

No, it's a Superfrog – or more importantly, a remake of Team 17's high-speed Amiga platform game. Obviously it's a little hard to say just from YouTube videos – and the development thread is at **http://kikstart.eu/superfrog** so readers can see for themselves how it's going. From those videos it would appear that the first world is well into production and *Superfrog*'s movement and controls have been kept faithful to the original.

FLASH BOREDOM



Want to know how to while away those boring office hours? Then don't miss out on **Retro Gamer**'s Flash game of the month. This month we look at **Boondog.**

BOONDOG HARKS back to the 16-bit era, both graphically and indeed on a gameplay level; the objective is to reach the teleporter to move on to the next stage, but that means climbing and jumping around, avoiding hazards and using barrels as launch pads or for holding down switches. http://kikstart.eu/boondog

REMAKES WE'VE BEEN PLAYING...



Remake of the Mouth



EXPLOSIONADE

» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/EXPLOSIONADE



According to the Mommy's Best Games blog, *Explosionade* is just like lemonade but with explosions, apparently. During an attempt by his regiment to storm the Horronym Fortress, private Atticcus has been left behind to keep an eye on the command ship and possibly fix a problem with the drains that, as a disciplined and responsible soldier, he decides to "borrow" a prototype mech and take it into the sewers, presumably planning on shooting the blockage. This turns out to be surprisingly wise because, in the bowels of the sewer system, the Horronym forces are up to something devious and with everyone else topside and somewhat pre-occupied it's down to Atticcus to stop them.

The battle takes place at close quarters, with the option to either view the mech's surroundings in close-up detail or zoom out to see the entire playfield. The mech itself comes fully stocked, armed with a multi-directional cannon on the right analogue stick, an infinite supply of grenades with a quick reload time that can take out certain parts of the landscape and temporary shielding that can also be used to bounce around levels; all of these toys will be used while trying to thwart the Horronym. So for 80 Microsoft Points that's a range of enemies with their own characteristics, three difficulty modes, the speed adjustment option and a healthy dose of solid, mech-based explosive action.



THE GOONIES

» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/GOONIES



The Goonies worked as a team in the film, and the same is true of this remake. Based on the Amstrad CPC version of Datasoft's official tie-in, the player controls two Goonies and can swap back and forth at will to solve puzzles on each screen.

The difficulty curve of the original was pretty steep and has been ramped up to truly frustrating levels and the second stage in particular has become almost insurmountable because the layout has been altered; the two valves that require a Goonie be left unattended by them now have unpredictable taps that launch fatal drops above them.

That makes getting past the level a matter of luck more than judgement, which sadly spoils what could have been a great remake.



HAIKU QUEST

» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/HAIKU



We've mentioned game titles that say what they do on the tin previously and John Szczepaniak's *Haiku Quest* is a role-playing game where the protagonist searches for enlightenment by learning the art of Haiku before composing his own. Writing Haikus really takes it out of our hero as well, so there's a limit of one a day before rest is required and, if the master is suitably impressed, one of five diamonds will be handed over.

For gamers who like random RPG encounters, terrible impressions of Christopher Walken and game-related Haiku poetry this game probably couldn't be recommended more heartily; for everybody else there's some short-term amusement to be found, although you'll probably want to turn the PC's speakers off first.



HOMEBREW HEROES

JONATHAN "TWILIGHTE" BRISTOW HAS A LOT OF LOVE FOR THE ORIC, LOVE THAT MANIFESTS ITSELF AS MACHINE CODE. SINCE HIS LATEST OFFSPRING STORMLORD HAS BEEN WELL RECEIVED, WE RATHER RUDELY INTERRUPTED HIS WORK SCHEDULE TO GET A FEW WORDS

Q&A

Retro Gamer: What was it that initially got you into writing games?
Jonathan Bristow: Well, I started writing games and demos when I was about 12. The computer platform suddenly opened up a whole new universe for me, as I could express my imagination in so many ways.

RG: And what drew you to the Oric as your platform of choice?
JB: Well I'd like to say it was my first computer, but it wasn't. My first was a ZX81 lent to me by a rich, eccentric friend of the family. I eventually bought an Oric from a dodgy geezer in my local town if only because both the C64 and Spectrum he had were being knocked off at a much higher price. Those many moons ago I tended to enjoy my own company a lot and became a bedroom programmer. Oric BASIC was a great platform for my imagination with sound and graphic commands built in (unlike the early onset of arthritis with the Spectrum keyboard or the everything pokes with the C64).

RG: What would you consider the most enjoyable and difficult parts of developing games?
JB: The most enjoyment I get these days is doing the graphics although even a good graphic artist friend of mine (Ptoing) who revels in such an art considers the Oric graphics the devil's domain. However, I have been dabbling in Oric graphics for nearly 30 years.

I also greatly enjoy writing the software engine from the ground up. *Stormlord* and *Pulsoids* are excellent examples. I only ever examine the gameplay, always preferring to work out how to do it myself.

RG: Which of your games are you most proud of and why?
JB: It's difficult to say. I was extremely proud on finally getting *Magnetix* finished after it had taken me five years to write. With its 27-minute title tune, full-screen scrolling and full intro/outro sections. *Zip N Zap* was a personal technical achievement of mine with simultaneous samples during gameplay and three-channel sample title tune. With every game I write alone, I have always done it and probably always will. This includes graphics, sound, code, etc. With each game I have reached a new level of personal achievement.

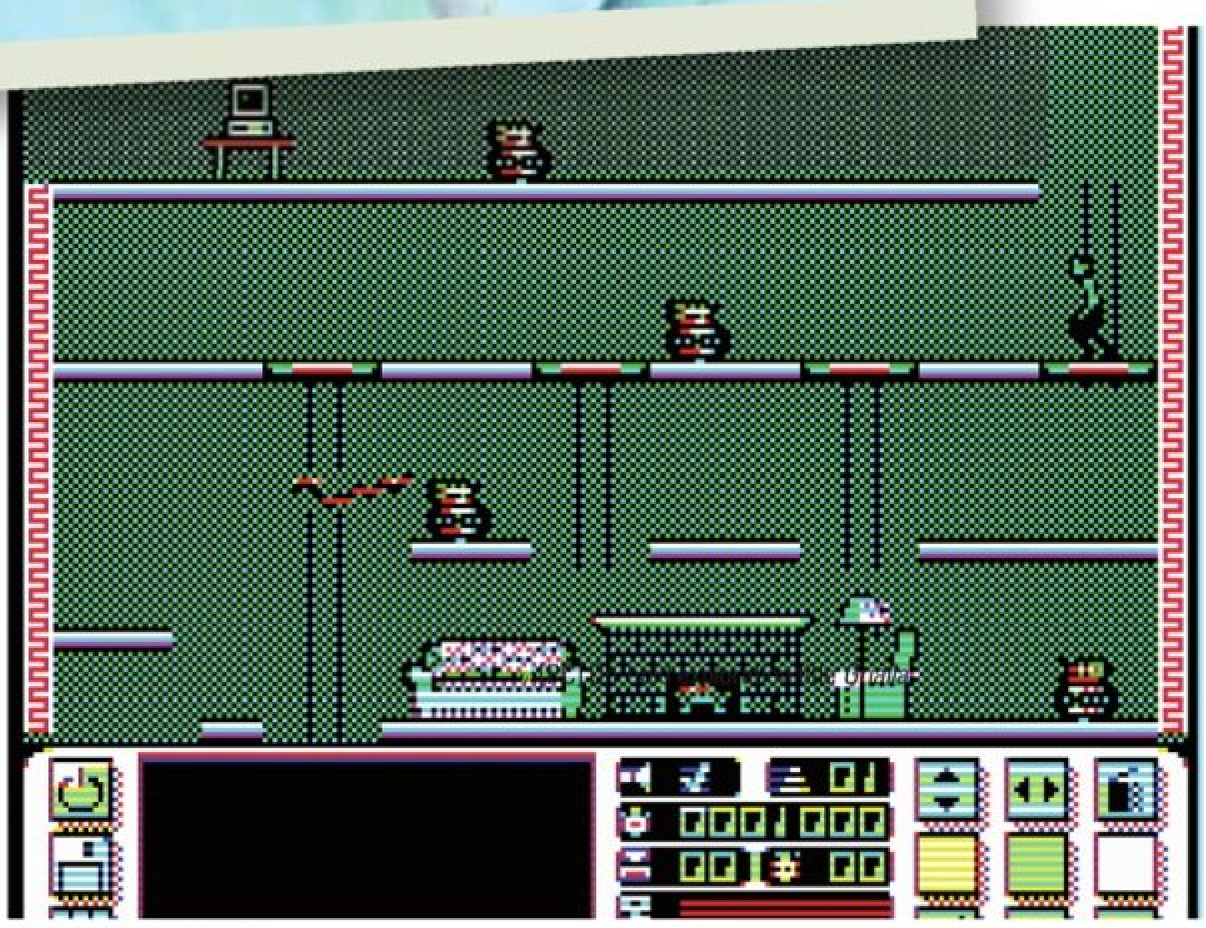
RG: So what are your plans for the future?
JB: Well I still have all those unfinished projects still dragging at my heels. *Impossible Mission* is almost there. My testers think its ready but I'm not happy with a few things. And I'm not stalling (on and off its taken about ten years to write). *Times Of Lore* needs to be finished. Written ground up but based (like all my non-original stuff) on the mighty 64 version. *Wurlde* is a game I've been working on for longer than I can remember. It is also bigger than any other game. It's an arcade adventure set in a completely original land, while *OTYPE* will be an original vertical smooth-scrolling full-colour shmup. It has been voted as the next game of choice for me to work on after *Impossible Mission*.

Beyond that I don't know. I used to have so many ambitions with Oric games, but now it seems I am only interested in completing the games I have at my heels.

RG: What advice can you give to any would-be indie developers reading?
JB: As JK pointed out in the review of my game *Stormlord*, the hardest thing of all is finishing and releasing the game. As a general rule the closer to release the harder the bugs become that makes it that much more difficult to finish the game.

Also there's the 'what to do first?' strategy. After so many years flitting from one idea to another I have come to realise that doing anything other than rudimentary graphics (or sound) is a sure fire bet that game wouldn't get done. What I'm trying to say is concentrate on the code and save the fun stuff till the end or at least until you have a better idea how the game-play will work. But then it's a little different these days. I work alone – some might say a perfectionist refuses and is refused assistance.

But, if nothing else, never give up… never surrender!



» [Oric] STAY FOREVER!

HIGH FIVE

The homebrew games that Jonathan can't live without

1. **Bip (Amiga)** Fantastic and utterly addictive especially when playing against sister!
2. **Impossible Mission (C64)** You can't get more fun into a single game than this.
3. **Times Of Lore (C64)** The sheer size and quality took my breath away, all in 64K.
4. **Armalyte (C64)** Two-player games can bond friendships forever – this game was genius.
5. **Targhan (Amiga)** Possibly the most beautiful game I have ever played.



» [Oric] Saving fairies from the evil witch.



» [Oric] An unusual take on *Breakout*.


3DArtist
MODEL WITH ZBRUSH
iTUNES SEARCH: 3D ARTIST
Retro GAMER
25 YEARS OF RARE
iTUNES SEARCH: RETRO GAMER
digital artist
How to use colour
iTUNES SEARCH: DIGITAL ARTIST MAGAZINE
games™
iTUNES SEARCH: GAMES TM
Everything you love about mags but now in digital form & yours forever!
DIGITAL camera ESSENTIALS
ULTIMATE GIFT GUIDE
iTUNES SEARCH: DIGITAL CAMERA ESSENTIALS
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THE FUTURE OF KINECT
iTUNES SEARCH: 360 MAGAZINE
Earthquakes
Tectonic plates explained
Available on the iPhone
App Store
IMAGINE PUBLISHING
POWERED BY
PIXELMAGS™
Requirements: Apple iPhone 3G, 3Gs, iPod Touch or iPad >> iPhone 3.1.2 or higher >> an Internet connection

MAILBAG

HAVE YOUR SAY… SEND US A LETTER OR MAKE YOURSELF HEARD ON THE ONLINE FORUM – **WWW.RETROGAMER.NET**

RG'LL (ATTEMPT TO) FIX IT

Hello,

I was wondering if you could possibly do a feature on D&H Games in a future issue. Back in the day, I owned a ZX Spectrum, and used to buy all the football management games it released. I remember paying £19.99 for *Football Director 2* and it taking forever to load. I even remember hacking the code, as it was written in Basic, and changing some bits around like adding my own cheat menu enabling me to make all of my players the best in the game, or when I bought a player instead of taking money from my balance it would add to it.

Darren

Despite not condoning cheating in any way, shape or form, you should know we always try our utmost to please. Thus, we'll get our team on the case and hopefully make your dream a reality. If we do make it happen, Steve (our designer) is concerned it won't look a particularly handsome feature – words decorated with day-glo words, lists and statistics. In fact, he'll probably have to slap a mental health warning over the intro.



» Darren (not ours) wants a feature on D&H Games. We do have concerns that the entire feature could look like a making-of Ceefax.

ULTIMATE PLAYA

Hi Darran,

Your recent RetroRevival of the *Ultimate Play The Game: Collected Works* inspired me to send this email. As with all things Ultimate, if you've ever managed to track down the four ROM cartridges, the money handed over for any of its stuff was through the roof, so the words 'like this was ever going to be poor value' did make me giggle.

You've got me back into collecting, and I have bought the magazine since issue 2. I remember seeing the first issue selling on eBay for £60, and also remember it had a CD covermount with 200 emulator games on it. I particularly enjoyed your 50th issue and its fantastic Dreamcast coverage. It actually inspired me to start collecting the better Dreamcast titles and I know you had a go yourself as I used to watch your YouTube channel. It was enjoyable watching you try to complete your Dreamcast collection before you decided to sell.

Anyway, I just wanted to say, to you and the team, carry on with the great variety of retro coverage in the magazine – we all appreciate it. I have cobbled together a quick appreciation of Ultimate Play The Game, I hope you like it.

Adrian Gillespie

Darran was especially pleased to hear that his wittering about Ultimate's Collected Works and YouTube vids struck a chord with you, Adrian. As you rightly say, Darran has now stopped collecting every single PAL Dreamcast game. In fact, he's sold off most of his collection

STAR LETTER

PARENTHOOD



» [Arcade] New father Scott had trouble getting to grips with the stand-up version of *OutRun*.

Dear Retro Gamer,

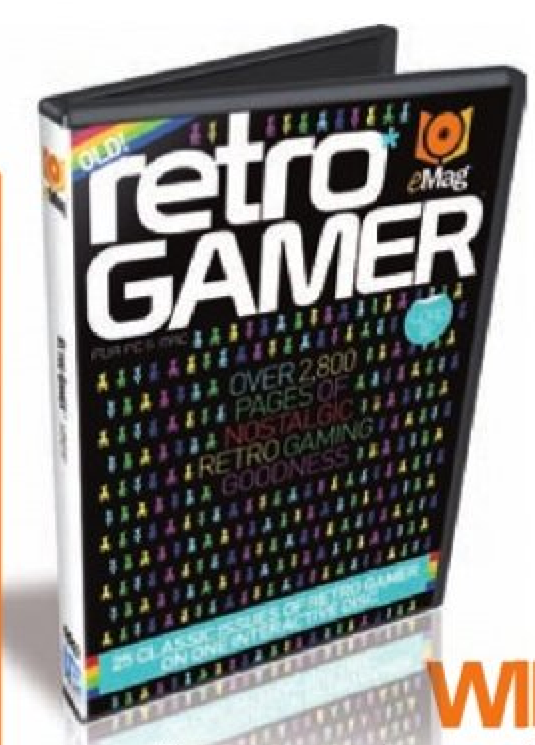
I had the opportunity earlier this month to get along to Retro R3play in Blackpool. My wife had a baby on the Saturday night so I didn't get along until late on the Sunday, but I took two of the kids and we spent a good hour-and-a-half gaming and having fun. There was something special about watching my 11 and 8-year-old playing arcade games I grew up with, and I did have a little chuckle to myself while they struggled with the unresponsiveness of the controls – although I did have a shot of the stand-up version of *OutRun* and did miserably. Oh well.

I thought it very fitting that it was held in Blackpool, as this is where I did most of my gaming as a kid on holiday and it seems to be one of the few places that still have some decent arcades left. Anyway, I'd just like to thank your magazine for making me aware of this event and bringing back happy memories. Had it not been for you I wouldn't have known it was happening.

Scott O

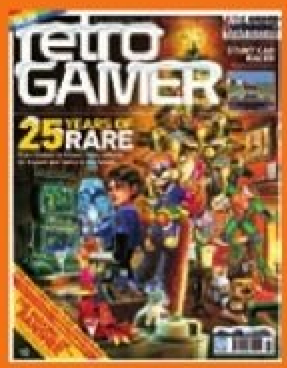
First off, a massive congratulations on the birth of your new baby. We hope mother and baby are well and we send you all our best wishes. Second, top marks for the dedication you showed in getting to the R3play event on Sunday. We're pleased to hear you had a good time, and from the feedback we got from everyone who attended it sounds like you're weren't the only one.

Well done to everyone involved in making the event such as success. We had a great time and are already looking forward to the next one. For writing such a nice email, you've earned yourself a copy of Retro Gamer Load 2 eMag. Have another bundle of joy.



WIN!

Every month, one lucky reader will receive a copy of our latest eMag, **Retro Gamer Load 2**, a bargain if ever there was one. All you have to do is present a lucid, thought-provoking piece of literature that melts our souls. Failing that, something funny with swear words, or something *Strider*-related will go down just as well…



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Email: retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk



>> YOUTUBE UPDATE

DARRAN TREATED HIMSELF to Kinect this month, so you can just imagine what happened next. No other YouTube channel features a combination of Retro Gamer reviews, Mega Drive classics and a fat man trying to dance. You have been warned…

www.youtube.com/user/RetroGamerDaz

now and has moved on to amassing PAL cat claw clippings instead. He now has an impressive collection of 54 individual specimens, which he keeps underneath his pillow. Unfortunately, he currently has no plans to document his new obsession via the medium of YouTube – he's concerned an opportunistic thief will find out about his unique horde, break into his room and snaffle his latest passion.

FUTURE CLASSIC HANGS IN THE BALANCE?

Dear Retro Gamer,

I just wanted to chime in with a response to Matthew Lightbourne's letter in issue 82, concerning his views on Future Classic articles. Far be it for me to question someone who writes to a mag titled **Retro Gamer** to declare its writers 'have no idea about retro gaming', but I am curious to know just what his definition of 'retro' actually is, since he has placed himself as the spokesperson for true retro gamers everywhere.

Up until I had my eyes opened by the sheer brilliance of this man's intelligence, I was under the delusion that, aside from being a rather subjective term, 'retro' is generally considered to be short for 'retrospective' or 'looking backwards', if you will. Therefore, I struggle to see why a console that games are no longer officially developed for could not be considered as such. I'm also curious to what Mr Lightbourne expected to find in an article titled 'Future Classic'? For some reason I was under the impression that the offending article might be about a (relatively speaking) old game that *Retro Gamer* feels will be viewed retrospectively as a classic in the near future. However, I do appreciate that my judgment has been heavily biased after making the mistake of actually reading the article, unlike Mr Lightbourne who proudly announced that he, in fact, did not.

Finally, a completely unrelated question that I hope the future star pupil from the *Daily Mail* school of investigative reporting will clear up for me: would someone writing into a magazine to complain about them 'not bothering to do proper research' concerning an article he/she did not actually read be considered ironic?

For the best part of 15 years my father has been putting forward the argument that excessive playing of videogames will make you a braindead moron. Naturally, in true rebellious fashion I carried on playing, only with the volume turned up. Having read Mr Lightbourne's letter I'm beginning to view my favoured pastime with just a little more suspicion.

Yours unintelligently,

Matthew Eastwood



>> Adrian Gillespie is responsible for this great tribute to Ultimate. Timely too, considering all the Rare coverage this month.

> "He now has a collection of 54 specimens, which he keeps under his pillow"

RETROBATE PROFILE



Name:	Matt Clarke
Joined:	4 Sept 2010
Location:	London
Occupation:	Freelance Multimedia Artist
Website:	arcadeawake.blogspot.com
Fave Games Systems:	A tie between ZX Spectrum 48k+ and SNES

Hi, Matthew. When we realised the other Matt had unfairly lambasted the Future Classic feature by not even bothering to read it, we'll admit it was a bit of a struggle to not respond with juvenilia. Actually, sod it. Just for you Mr Eastwood here's our original response, but done in the medium of poetry to make it sound less aggressive:

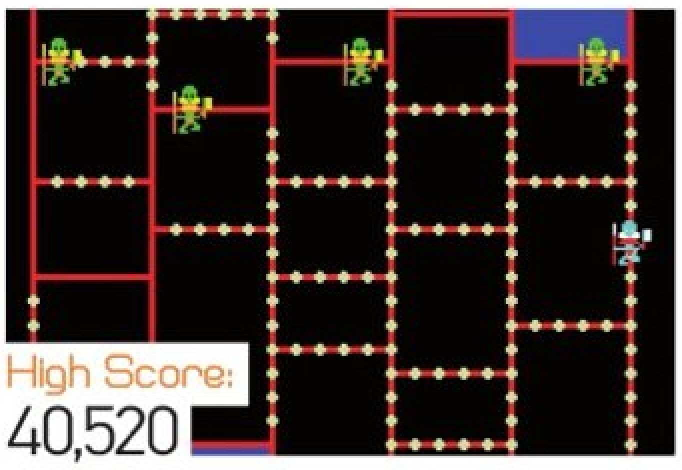
Future Classic
By Anon

There once was a bloke named Matt,
Who liked to criticise without first learning facts,
He would imagine he read stuff,
Just to make fuss,
Future Classic is staying,
Future Classic is staying.

>>

* BEAT THE TEAM

Think you're good at retro games? See if you can beat the staff at some of their favourite titles



High Score: 40,520



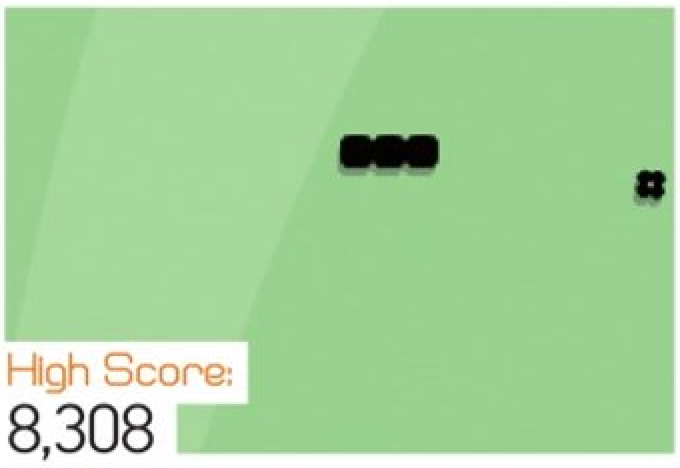
DARRAN
CHOSEN GAME: AMIDAR
Why I picked it: It's a fantastic game that pulls me back for one more go.
Handy tip: Filling in the four corners makes you invincible for a short time. Use it to kill the Amidars and tracer.



High Score: 49,970



STUART
CHOSEN GAME: BOMB JACK
Why I picked it: Simple, fun, addictive; it's one of my fave arcade games.
Handy tip: Earn bonus points by going after alighted bombs, but never do so at the risk of losing a life – the aim is always to clear the screen.



High Score: 8,308



DAVID
CHOSEN GAME: SNAKE
Why I picked it: I found an old Nokia 3210 stuffed in a drawer.
Handy tip: Try to keep the snake on the outside of the screen for as long as possible, drilling in only when necessary.

From the forum

» To have your say visit www.retrogamer.net/forum

Every month, Retro Gamer asks a question on the forum and prints the best replies. This month we wanted to know…

Best ever Christmas present?

Mayhem
Still receiving my copy of *MicroProse Soccer* for the C64 after discovering it in my parents' cupboard a month before Xmas and playing it while they were out, naturally eventually getting caught in the process.

thevulture
A year subscription to **Retro Gamer**! What stands out the most though, was the unwrapping of the Atari 2600 my folks had got me. It came with a stack of games. They must have paid a small fortune, but best Christmas ever!

Timothy Lumsden
My brother laughing at my new VIC-20 - then opening his gift to find he had a Mattel Aquarius.

noobish hat
Final Fantasy VII by a mile. I missed most of Christmas dinner because I was busy playing this. My dad had bought it back in November, but I had to wait!

bsg
It would have to be my first entry into 'real' computing: my Atari 800XL and peripherals. I've still got it sat behind me now, with its twin and many, many additions. Christmas Day in my house was peaceful that day… other than the outbursts of 'boot error? BOOT ERROR?! WTF!' and yet it is still my most beloved of all my systems.

ipmarks
Getting *Lunar Jetman* and *Atic Atac* and then spending all day playing them and ignoring my whole extended family who had driven from the North to be with us. They must have thought I was a right rude little sod, which of course I was. I didn't care though because I had two cassettes of Ultimate's finest to play all day. Happy Christmas times indeed.

JetSetWilly
Mine would be the year I had my first taste of 16-bit gaming: the mighty Amiga 500 and loading up *Lemmings* on Christmas morning. Six hours later, I was still there.

Coxy
I begged and pleaded with my parents to get me a Mega Drive for Christmas. They got me a SNES with a copy of *Street Fighter II Championship Edition* and *B.O.B.* – really disappointed until I plugged that little grey box of wonder in the television and was instantly hooked!

Smurph
Easy. It's the Vectrex that I finally got last year after all the complaining I've done for years. Thanks, wifey!

sirclive1
Present-wise it was my Spectrum, but I got a Christmas card off Tim Stamper a few years back, which I still have.

JD!
The Sega Master System complete with *Ghostbusters* game. Why? Because *Ghostbusters* was and is my favourite movie and that game and that console started my love for digital adventuring, which now has me spending way too much money on old games and quite a bit on new ones as well.

Gabe
The best gaming-related present is waking up on Christmas Day and finding my love for gaming hasn't diminished at all.

Dunjohn
Sneaking downstairs early to get my shiny new Mega Drive, playing it for an hour before anybody else woke up, and basically ruining the present-opening ritual for the whole family.

yakmag
Christmas 1983. I had been dropping hints about VIC-20, saw the large oblong box under the tree and went to unwrap it… it was only a Commodore 64! Life hasn't been the same since!

PrimalScientist
For me it's still getting gaming presents on Christmas Day! Love it! I remember getting *Dead Space* on the PS3, playing Christmas night in the dark all scared! Then I remember I'm 39 years old.

ismellicecream
Mine was finally getting my very own Speccy +2, with *Robocop*, *Back To Skool* and *Treasure Island Dizzy* to play. I still make sure I play them at least once during Christmas.

Britnostalgic
Without question my Amstrad CPC and oh Mummy! Thank you!

Dizrythmia
For me it would be the two Amstrad CPC games, *Double Dragon* and the 'Heroes' compilation. This was a really big deal for me as no one was selling Amstrad games in Australia at that time.

paranoid marvin
The bumper *Crash!* Christmas Special from 86/87 – Lloyd's Lookback. Bliss.

Fishsta
I liked getting my Spectrum, but then I also liked getting my Amiga. But which was better? There's only one way to find out… FIIIIIGHT!

YOUR OPINION PLEASE

2-PLAYER SNES GAMES

Jay You can't go wrong with *Unirally*, *Super Puyo Puyo 2*, *Kirby's Dream Course*, *Super Bomberman* series, *Smash TV* and *Super Contra*.

batman877 *Mario Kart*, obviously. Others worth mentioning: *Super Tennis*, *Mystical Ninja*, *TMNT IV: Turtles In Time*, *Super Probotector*, *Street Fighter II Turbo*.

FatTrucker Definitely *Rock 'N' Roll Racing* and multiplayer *Super Bomberman* is the most fun you can have with your clothes on.

C=Style *International Superstar Soccer* is a great laugh, as is the original *NBA Jam*; I prefer the SNES version over the MD one – it's near gaming perfection. I also wasted many hours playing two-player *Stunt Race FX* too. Brilliant!

WORST CHARACTER

Liamh1982 My top 5: Shadow The Hedgehog, Princess Peach, Diddy Kong, Dee Jay, and the numero uno: Angus from *Kasumi Ninja* and his painted-on beard!

Havantgottaclue I must admit that I find Daxter to be an annoying little twonk (I know he's supposed to be, he's just a little bit too good at it).

delbert_trout Awesome Possum (Mega Drive).

OldSkoolCoolFool I really hated Lara Croft… the games were good but would have been far better had the main character had an ounce of personality.

Ferret Oxide Another vote for Navi from me. Also: That bee from *Sonic Heroes*, Smarmy or whatever its name was. Tries to be childlike, comes across as a moron.

THE WALKING DEAD

Britnostalgic Saw this last night, and it's amazing. Basically a cop gets shot during a shootout and wakes from his coma to find everything is not as before. I'd go as far to say that it's as good as any other zombie movie or TV series ever done before it.

necronom I thought it was great. It had some impressive effects, too. I'm looking forward to the next one.

mainvein I recorded it last night and can't wait to watch it, but I'm in a dilemma now as I only ever watch TV series once they have all been on, and then I like to watch the whole lot in one go. Shall I hold off watching or just start it as it does look amazing?

psj3809 Go on, be crazy and watch one episode at a time. To be fair my mum's taped 4,690 episodes of *EastEnders* as she's waiting for it to end and then watch it in one go.

OLD vs NEW

Each month, we'll be finding out if the classics are better than their successors. This month, which GoldenEye is the best?

GoldenEye (N64)



GoldenEye (Wii)



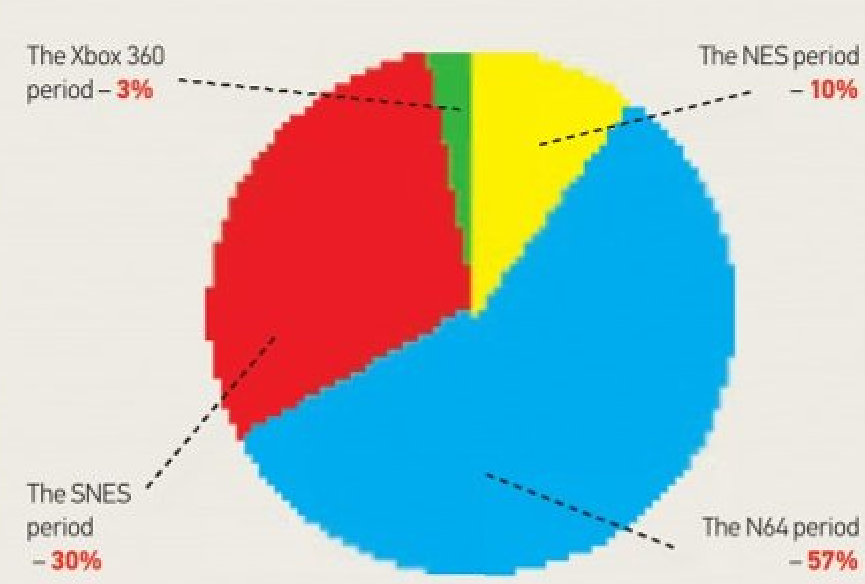
77% | 23%

JetSetWilly As awesome as I think the new one is, it just can't stand up to the original.

r0jaws I had a go of the new one and it was pretty good; slick graphics and gameplay.

HOT TOPIC

Best Rare Era



"While every era had a lot of quality, the sheer amount of brilliance of the N64 era stands out by a mile for me." **– nakamura**

"SNES era, maybe because *Killer Instinct* is really the only Rare game I've played to any great extent." **– Liamh1982**

"Rare was unstoppable and unbeatable in the N64 era." **– Roo**

THIS GENERATION'S GAMES YESTERDAY

Dear Retro,

Why do games producers stop making games for last-gen consoles? Look at the original PlayStation; it's still a great machine. In fact, the three best ever *Resident Evil* games – *1*, *2* and *Nemesis* – are on there.

Okay, the answer is in the question 'last generation', but there is an installed user base, so why then not develop games in tandem with 'next-gen' stuff? I would love to have seen how the *Resi* games developed over the years, and *Code Veronica* is a game I would love to have seen on PlayStation.

One of the great things too is the effect this would have on game development costs – it would be cheaper and quicker to make *Resi 5* on PlayStation than PS3. Plus I like consoles that don't have noisy fans going on.

Robert, Cheshire

Mmm…?! …Anyone?!



» [PS3] Can you imagine *Resident Evil 5* running on the PlayStation? Nope, neither can we.

> "I did have a shot of the stand-up version of OutRun and did miserably. Oh well…"

MARIO GAINS A NEW FAN… ALMOST

Hi guys,

I've just finished reading your excellent *Mario* issue, and have to say, though I don't consider myself a fan of Nintendo's portly plumber, I found your coverage quite interesting. Not only did I find the cover inspired, but I loved all the many elements in the feature, in particular the sections asking various industry veterans about their memories and thoughts about *Mario*. I was most impressed to see that you had managed to get Ralph Baer to offer his thoughts.

While it hasn't changed my opinion of the franchise in any way, I would like to see **RG** approach future features in this manner. Keep up the good work, and congrats on the award. It's thoroughly deserved, in my opinion.

Ben Kebwob

Thanks for your letter, Ben. Reaction was mixed to all the *Mario* content in issue 82, but we stand by our belief that the protracted coverage was justified. No fans will be pleased to hear that you're unlikely see any more *Mario* features appearing in the magazine for a while – unless of course Miyamoto finally agrees to an interview, in which case we'd be all over the portly plumber again like a tramp on chips. In answer to your question, though, we are looking at introducing the occasional marathon-sized feature every now and then – but only if we think it's justified. In fact, there's one in this very issue.



» With Mario's wish finally realised, perhaps he'll stop pestering us for coverage. Persistent isn't the word.

DISCUSSED THIS MONTH

Kinect

Steve revealed to us that he had Kinect on pre-order. And he wasn't fibbing. On launch day it was delivered to work, and both Stuart and Darran were left envious when the shoebox-sized box arrived. But it was when we asked Steve if he was looking forward to annoying his neighbours that a second bombshell was revealed: he wasn't even going to unwrap it. Instead, he was going to profiteer from demand by listing it on eBay during Christmas. It just goes to prove those designers can be shrewd sorts.

CURRENTLY PLAYING





DARRAN

Magic The Gathering Online

Scars Of Mirrordin is in full swing and I'm finally starting to get used to its intricacies. Drafting is still a little hit and miss, but my Blue/White control deck is finishing off anyone foolish enough to challenge me.





STUART

Vanquish

Shinji Mikami's follow up to *Bayonetta* is up there with his best work. At moments it plays like *Gears Of War*, *Halo* and *Metal Gear Solid* is having a noisy ménage à trois on the set of a James Cameron movie.





DAVID

RasherBasher

It has a similar vibe to the Nineties CPC classic *Croco Magneto* but with pigs, loads of hazards and a bit of toilet humour. And it's also damn hard – at times I've almost thrown my iPhone out of the window. Fun, though.

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FABLE III
HAS MOLYNEUX FINALLY
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180
PAGES OF
HEROIC
GAMING
HIGHLIGHTS
MARVEL VS. CAPCOM 3 [MULTI] KINECT SPORTS [360]
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"BATMAN MAY HAVE MADE THE FRONT PAGE, BUT BRUCE WAYNE GOT PUSHED TO PAGE EIGHT"

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next month

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Let's Go!

Join us as we look back at the history of one of gaming's most successful franchises

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE



Sonic Spinball

■ Discover how Sonic went from platforming icon to hanging out in a gigantic pinball machine



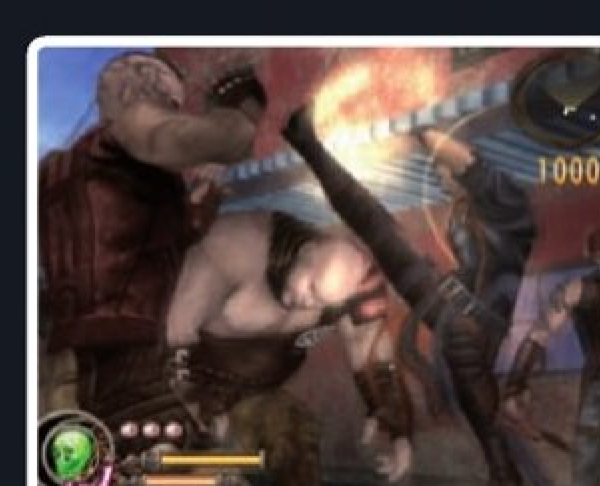
Where Time Stood Still

■ We find out how Denton Designs went prehistoric for its epic follow-up to the seminal *The Great Escape*



Jet Set Willy II

■ How do you create a sequel to one of the most popular platformers of all time? Creator Derrick Rowson reveals all

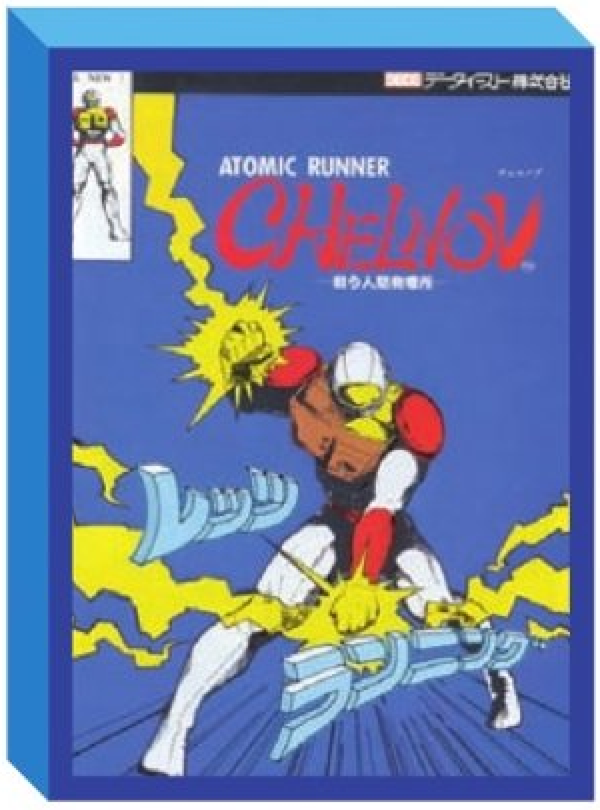


God Hand

■ Why Capcom's insane PS2 brawler will be regarded as the greatest scrolling beat-'em-up of all time

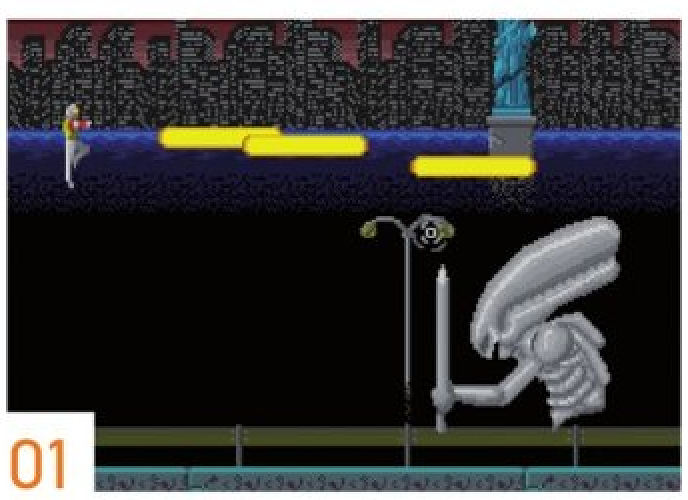

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ENDGAME



CHELNOV: ATOMIC RUNNER

» Atomic Runner can almost be described as the gaming equivalent of Monty Mole, spliced with the Duracell Bunny meets that bit in Forrest Gump where he decides to run for about six years. It tells the story of a poor coal miner who is given superpowers following a nuclear blast. His race for survival ends in New York, where a familiar-looking enemy is awaiting his arrival.



01

» Chelnov reaches the end of his epic run, but waiting for him at the finish line is half a Xenomorph from the *Alien* franchise. This one appears to be made of steel and is wielding a giant sword, which more than makes up for its lack of legs.



02

» In a probable bid to help make this ending seem even more dramatic, Chelnov and the Alien are randomly whisked to just in front of the Statue of Liberty's face. Be careful of Lady Liberty's complexion, Chelnov.



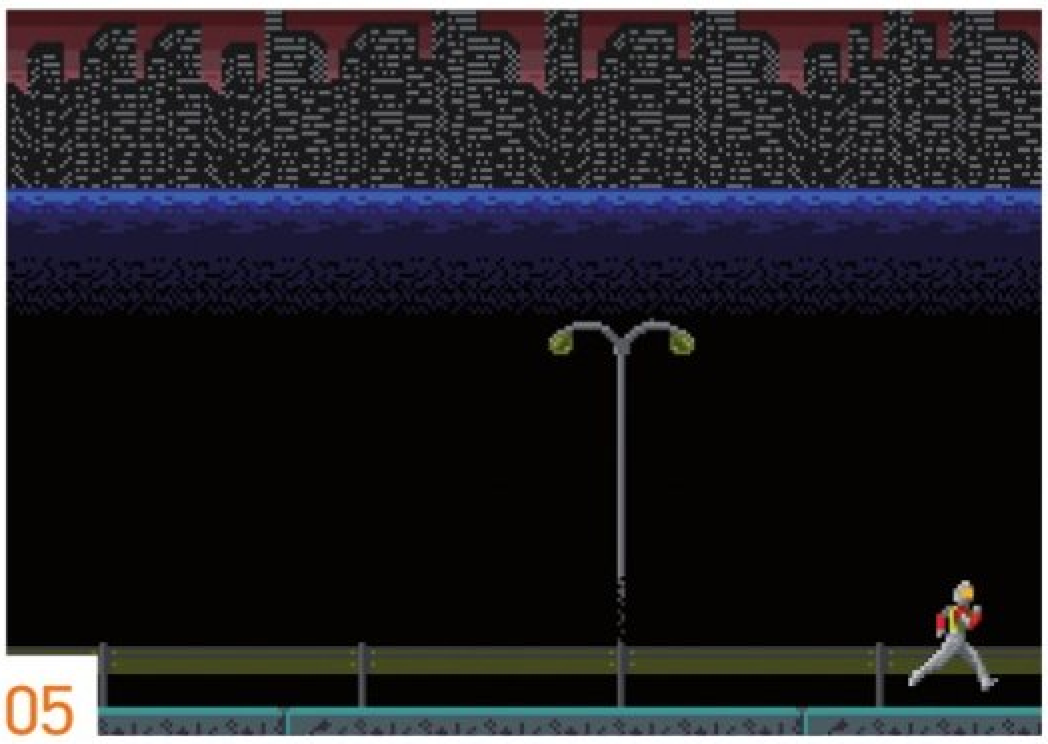
03

» Oh dear. It looks like you owe New York a new giant head to replace the one currently being blown to bits. This will do nothing to help strengthen Soviet-American international relations, Chelnov. You did save the universe, though.



04

» Crisis averted. It looks like the head is still there, minus a face. No time to worry about that now, though, as you're about to be presented with your well-earned congratulations. Oh dear. It's not good news: it would appear your homeland has been destroyed.



05

» What's that noise? It's the sound of thousands of annoyed New Yorkers wanting to melt your face off in revenge. But with no home to return to, you're just going to have to keep running until this all blows over. Run for your life, Chelnov!


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